The Wraiths and Their Silent Voices
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Harry Potter, Tom Riddle, Albus Dumbledore, Minerva McGonagall, Severus Snape, Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger, Draco Malfoy, Theodore Nott, Blaise Zabini, Cormac McLaggen, Horace Slughorn, Hogwarts Students, Hogwarts Staff, Everybody and their friends are in this

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The Wraiths and Their Silent Voices

by ATiredAndDeadWriter

Summary

In a world where Harry Potter chooses to seek his own answers instead of waiting around for Dumbledore, everything is different.

As the new school year arrives, Harry and his friends must overcome new challenges as their plans unfold. With pieces moving, Dumbledore looming, and a revolution on the horizon, will they be able to finish what they started?

Notes

You guys! ♡♡♡ *The sequel is finally here.*

If you're new here, hi! Please go check out the first work in this series The Speaker and His Wraiths because otherwise this is gonna be real confusing 😅

For my lovely returning readers, welcome back and I'm so excited to kickstart this new work!! All your excitement just makes me even more excited!!

I hope you guys enjoy this ♡♡♡

Rated 'Teen' for swearing ♡

Slughorn's First Meeting

Chapter Summary

Harry's adventures as Mister Cork, discovering truths he wished he didn't that changed his life, for better or for worse.

Chapter Notes

Today is the day!!

We're starting off strong here with a flashback explanation!! This work as a whole will feature a lot of plot surrounding Slughorn, Harry, and Dumbledore, (possibly Mister Cork too...) so this chapter will set the stage for all of that to come!

I hope you guys enjoy ♡♡

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter One

The Adventures of Mister Cork

Harry reckoned if someone saw him they'd think he was insane. If his relatives walked in unexpectedly Harry knew they'd pitch a fit, but he didn't particularly care about them anymore. He'd been sneaking out for over three weeks now and they hadn't noticed a thing. If they hadn't discovered him by now he doubted they ever would. Regardless, it didn't dampen the amusement it sparked to notice their obliviousness.

Sitting on his bedroom floor, wrapped in the scratchy blanket from his bed, Harry surrounded himself with plans. Dozens of books were lying open on the floor around him, journals and yearbooks discarded near his dresser, papers strewn about rather indiscriminately. All that mattered was that he could see it all at once, no matter how mad he looked boxed in by resources collected from weeks of research.

Ever since Harry discovered Dumbledore hid the Prophecy from him - when he first realized the Headmaster wasn't as trustworthy as he thought - one thing after another was slowly convincing him that maybe Dumbledore wasn't the great man Harry always thought him to

be. Once upon a time Harry might've listened to and trusted Dumbledore completely, but for the past few weeks Harry's trust was fading, replaced by wary suspicion.

If there was anything Harry was *really* good at, it was finding things he wasn't meant to and getting into situations he wasn't supposed to. Sure it usually led to mountain trolls and basilisks and werewolves, but what else was new? Looking at the facts of the situation at hand, Harry didn't really have a choice.

Too much was happening all at once. Dumbledore was keeping secrets, Ron and Hermione weren't writing him anymore, being alone with the Dursleys was slowly chipping away at his sanity, and the nightmares of Cedric and the graveyard only brought his grief to the surface with every day that passed. Harry was drowning. But now he'd found a way to swim.

He was going to make his own way, find his own answers, and solve his problems without caring what Dumbledore thought. If Dumbledore was content to ignore him, Harry would ignore him right back. So Harry was starting with research - research into Dumbledore himself.

“Who's next?” Harry murmured into his empty room, “Who else…”

Over the past week Harry hunted down each and every staff member he knew worked with Dumbledore during the time he was a Transfiguration Professor. He looked into when they quit, where they worked after, whether they stayed relatively close to Hogwarts, and everything in between. He learned a lot from that alone, but that wasn't all he found. Harry already knew Dumbledore's time as a Transfiguration Professor overlapped with Tom Riddle's time as a student, but new information came to light that sparked curiosity and doubt.

Tom Riddle applied to be the Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor in 1945 shortly after graduating, but was denied by the Headmaster at the time, Armando Dippet, due to Riddle's young age. It wasn't even three months later that Headmaster Dippet resigned - and who should take his place but Albus Dumbledore? When Tom Riddle returned, older and more learned, to apply for the position again, Dumbledore turned him away without hesitation. An interesting sequence of events…

At first the facts and timeline may’ve seemed unrelated, but according to almost every person Harry interviewed so far… they very much

were connected.

Seven out of the nine Professors Harry interviewed mentioned Tom Riddle as one of the students Dumbledore unfairly accused of evil deeds, and the one subjected to his attention most often. Apparently Dumbledore had an aversion to Slytherins in general, occasionally picking random students to give detention or scold for no reason, but with Riddle it was more prominent, enough so that nearly everyone noticed. It was no question to them why Dumbledore denied Riddle the position, given the terrible history between them.

A couple years ago Harry might've thought they were all crazy. Dumbledore was in the wrong and Tom Riddle, aka *Voldemort*, was completely innocent? That just sounded wrong on so many levels!! But with evidence stacking up, too many things dropped in Harry's lap at once, suddenly he wasn't so sure anymore.

Harry didn't know what to do with all the information he was finding, or what to think about it all. He also didn't know how it fit in with his dreams and the Prophecy he recently discovered. But he knew there was something more going on beneath it all - Harry just couldn't figure out *what*. Not yet, anyway.

But he would. Harry was sure of it. Determination was one of his chief Gryffindor traits, and he planned to use every ounce of it to find the answers he was looking for.

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Harry looked in the bathroom mirror carefully, making sure everything was in place. The blue contacts were snugly sitting in his eyes, though they made his eyes water a little, and the square glasses he wore sat perched against his nose. He again straightened the bright red beanie that hid his hair, then double checked the foundation covering his scar was well in place. He wore the same disguise for every Professor, using the same name and everything. He wanted to become someone new for these ventures - an aspiring journalist on the hunt for the truth.

It had taken about a week to collect his full disguise, slowly nabbing a

few sterling from Petunia's purse to collect enough money to afford the Muggle supplies and inconspicuous clothes. He didn't dare touch his uncle's wallet - Vernon counted his money, so that was a sure way to get caught. Regardless, Harry eventually had his whole disguise in order and wore it when interviewing every Professor. It wasn't perfect, but it did stop them from immediately clocking him as 'The Great Harry Potter, The-Boy-Who-Lived,' and that was the biggest part, really.

With a deep breath, Harry left the bathroom and headed to Apartment Number 65 and knocked soundly. He waited. A moment later a man answered the door; he was rounded and wide like uncle Vernon, but bald to the point of his head being shiny, his expression pleasant and joyous. Overly so, in Harry's opinion.

"Professor Horace Slughorn?" Harry prompted, dramatically flipping through a few pages on the clipboard he had in hand.

"Yes." The man confirmed with a laugh. "Though I haven't been a Professor in many years, ha! What can I do for you?"

"I'm Roland Cork, an aspiring Wizarding journalist." Harry said, grinning brightly at Slughorn. "I've been interviewing retired Professors from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, mostly regarding their careers and notable moments while teaching. I'd just like a moment of your time, perhaps 15 to 20 minutes, to ask you a few questions."

"How interesting!" Slughorn exclaimed. "And which of my old colleagues have you interviewed?"

"Several, actually." Harry told him. Again he flipped a few pages on the clipboard, trailing his fingers along the words as if referencing the information he'd already memorized backwards and upside down. "Two of them mentioned and recommended I visit you personally. Healer Merrythought, the previous Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor that shared her time at Hogwarts with you, and Professor Babbling, the Ancient Runes Professor that overlapped with you more briefly."

"Mentioned me, did they?"

"Yes sir, they spoke very highly of you. And they told me about an interesting club you ran while you taught." Harry said enthusiastically. "The Slug Club? I was wondering if I could ask you about that as well! I hear you had a variety of talented students over

the years."

"That I did, my boy!" Slughorn laughed. "I'm still in contact with the majority of them, I'll have you know. They still greatly rely on me, and all regularly update me on their lives and careers!"

"How exciting!" Harry gasped. "Tell me everything!"

"Well, not everything, of course. A man's gotta have *some* secrets now." Slughorn said with a wink. "But I'd love to tell you about it."

"Great!" Harry enthused. "I'd like to ask you about a few specific students as well, if you don't mind. Including, but not limited to: Miranda Goshawk, Lyall Lupin, Tom Riddle, and Tiberius Nott. They were all in your famous Slug Club, right? The other Professors really sang their praises as well, and I was just wondering if you'd weigh in on their academic accomplishments and personal successes."

As he spoke, Harry noticed Slughorn suddenly go still. His cheer slowly faded into a more tense smile, that joyful attitude melting away. Harry tilted his head, examining the man. What could've caused that?

"Professor?" Harry prompted.

"Oh yes, they were." Slughorn said, clearing his throat loudly. "All lovely, lovely students." He seemed tight-lipped regarding that, which Harry filed away in his brain for later. He moved on smoothly.

"In any case, I'd also like to discuss your relationship with Headmaster Dumbledore. I believe you attended Hogwarts together as students? And he was the Transfiguration Professor for a long while before transitioning to become the Headmaster of Hogwarts." Harry again flipped some pages, pausing with a hum. "Professor Merrythought cited you two were quite close back in the day. Would you mind telling me more about that as well, in the interview?"

"Uh, well, Dumbledore and I had a… *working* relationship." Somehow Slughorn had grown even more tense. "If you've come to talk to me about Dumbledore specifically, I can't help you on that front."

"That's alright, I have plenty of other questions." Even as he said it, Harry realized he'd hit a wall in the conversation. So he improvised. "Oh! Is now a bad time?" Harry asked, painting concern across his face. "I'm so sorry! I didn't even ask, how rude of me. How about I come back at a later date? We can continue some other time. How

does that sound? We'll get this sorted in no time, I'm sure of it."

"Yes, quite." Slughorn nodded, clearing his throat again. "Perhaps a later date would be preferable. I'll check my schedule and see when might be able to–"

"Oh don't even worry about it, Professor!" Harry exclaimed. "I'll figure something out. Next time I'll have the questions all sketched out, so we can just get started instead of standing around in the doorway. We can go over them together then, don't you fret! Bye Professor, it was lovely meeting you. Have a lovely day!"

Without waiting and completely ignoring Slughorn's sputtered protests, Harry promptly left with a skip in his step until he rounded a corner and Slughorn was out of sight. Then Harry paused, frowning as he made his way out of the apartment building more slowly, turning the interaction over in his head. It was interesting how Slughorn flipped his attitude so quickly…

According to the other Professors, Slughorn had sorta played favorites with Tom Riddle - mentoring him and putting him on a pedestal above his other students. Harry didn't expect Slughorn to get so skittish at the mere mention of him. And Harry thought throwing in a bunch of other Slug Club members would help mask the specificity! Damn. He hadn't been subtle enough, unfortunately. Well, at least that wasn't the only thing Harry learned.

It seemed Dumbledore was a sensitive topic for Slughorn, but in a different way than it was for the other Professors.

Healer Merrythought had full-on bashed Dumbledore, accusing him of blatant discrimination based on House without any sort of discretion; it was obvious she was both disdainful and unafraid of Albus Dumbledore. Professor Babbling was a bit more delicate regarding her viewpoint, but again Harry was told Dumbledore was the type to play favorites, whether it be positive or negative favoritism. Herbert Beery, the Herbology Professor of that time, said Dumbledore was a powerful yet prejudiced man; he did not sound fond of Dumbledore, though Beery did seem to respect him. Overall, none of them were loyal to Dumbledore, and none of them even *liked* him. It made Harry wonder how in the world he became Headmaster in the first place. Especially the convenient timing of the switch happening directly after Riddle's graduation…

But for Slughorn it seemed he was possibly *afraid* of Dumbledore in a

way the others weren't. That struck Harry was odd, especially considering Slughorn and Dumbledore went to school together and were quite close. They should've been on relatively even footing without too much of a knowledge or even a power imbalance, especially with them being the same age. But, then again, Harry was beginning to understand there was far more going on than he'd previously guessed, and lots more he just couldn't see yet.

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Harry waited five days before approaching Slughorn again. In those five days he sketched out exactly what questions he wanted to ask in which order, and how to steer the conversation if Slughorn became skittish or vague in answering. There was only so much preparing he could do, so eventually Harry just mustered his confidence and headed to see Slughorn again.

Upon answering the door, Harry could already see the difference in how the Professor planned on greeting him. His smile was less joyous, eyes less bright, and posture more strict as he stood in the doorway.

“Hello again.” Slughorn said. “Mister Cork, was it?”

“Exactly sir!” Harry said brightly. “I've got everything all set up. And don't worry, I'll run this exactly as I did the other Professors, and they said it wasn't a hassle at all. May I come in?”

“Uh, why yes of course!” Slughorn stammered a little, but he did move aside enough for Harry to squeeze by him.

“Thank you sir.” Harry smiled widely. “You have a lovely home.” Just from a glance, Harry deduced Slughorn was very… *showy.*

The room was simple yet tastefully expensive, an ornate lampshade or embellished cushion adding a richer atmosphere, and the walls were decorated with Slughorn's successes. Certificates and awards and trophies, some from his years as a student and even more from after. It was immediately obvious he prized himself on his accomplishments and very little else.

And not just *his* accomplishments, but those of his students as well. That was telling in and of itself - it told Harry that Slughorn was the type to thrive off other people's successes, maybe even more so than his own.

“Ah yes, I see you're drawn to my collections.” Slughorn laughed as Harry paused, looking over the shelves upon shelves of photos and frames and faces smiling wide. “Those are some of my brightest students. Greatly talented, I'll proudly say.”

“I imagine you helped them reach their highest potential, sir.” Harry said. “You must've been very loved as a Professor.” Even as he said it, and even as Slughorn laughed, Harry got a slimy sort of feeling from it all.

“Indeed I did, I'll admit!” Slughorn said, his stiffness melting away a little as he laughed loudly. “I take great pride in my students, as you must've noticed. And I'm still in contact with many of them to this day! So many great minds out there these days, you know.”

“How wonderful.” Harry replied. “Shall we get started then? I don't want to take up too much of your time, sir.”

It felt like too long before they were seated comfortably in the stuffy sitting room, Slughorn having quickly made tea while chatting to Harry about mindless subjects and boasting about his students as if he'd also accomplished what they had along with them - his hubris and blatant arrogance made Harry want to leave and not come back. Unfortunately, Slughorn had valuable information Harry needed and he wasn't leaving without it.

“Ah, that's enough from me.” Slughorn finally paused, clearing his throat. He nodded towards Harry with his cup of tea. “Now then, what was it you needed from me?”

“Oh, I just have a handful of questions.” Harry said, smiling.

“Ask away.” In the process of small talk and making of tea, Slughorn had relaxed enough to seem genuinely receptive to Harry's questions, which was a massive relief. Still, Harry started off easy.

“To start, tell me a little about how you came to teach at Hogwarts.” Harry said, turning a page on his clipboard as he did. “Looking into it, I found you started there when you were around fifty years old. Is that correct?”

“You've done your research!” Slughorn laughed. “Yes, when I graduated from Hogwarts I went on to become a Potioneer, for a time. I traveled around and saw the sights, absorbing what I could while I was still in my prime years. You wouldn't believe how many talented individuals I mentored at the time, many of them are so famous you'd blanch knowing it was I who trained them! But when Dumbledore reached out to me with news that he'd been offered a position at Hogwarts, suddenly I wondered if teaching could be my new passion.”

As Slughorn spoke Harry flipped to his notebook at the back of the clipboard, scribbling down short-hand of what he was hearing. He wasn't worried about Slughorn reading it - Harry's penmanship with a quill was so bad sometimes he couldn't read it himself. And he wrote it!

“It was about two years after that, about 1931, I believe, that I applied to be the Potions Master at Hogwarts.” Slughorn continued. He was smiling wide, genuine and fond. Despite the ick of how he spoke about some of his students, it seemed he really did enjoy teaching. “The previous Potions Master was stepping down, you see, so really it was perfect timing!”

“How wonderful!” Harry looked up from his writings to say. “It seems you found teaching very fulfilling, correct?”

“That's just right.” Slughorn agreed brightly. “Truly, those were the best years of my life.” Harry decided this was a great time for his next angle.

“And how has your retirement been?” Harry asked, flipping through some pages absently. “From what I've read, and heard from your fellow Professors, you departed in 1981 just after He-Must-Not-Be-Named's defeat. Do you miss it at all?”

“To tell you the truth, yes, I do.” Slughorn admitted. “It is a sad thing to know current and future students will never know my name, never understand the brilliance my Slug Club held. But I'm getting on in years. I recently celebrated my 114th birthday, I'll have you know.”

“Wow! That's amazing!” Harry exclaimed dramatically. “I imagine a man such as yourself threw a brilliant part to celebrate.”

“That I did, my boy!” Slughorn chuckled. “All my students and important peers attended, it was an amazing occasion.”

“Yours and Headmaster Dumbledore's birthdays are only four months

apart, did he attend?" Harry asked. "I can't imagine he wouldn't, after so many years of friendship." Immediately Slughorn's cheer turned sour, his smile tightening.

"Ah, well, no. Not exactly." Slughorn set down his tea, signing. "Mister Cork, I am happy to discuss my career, my accomplishments, and especially my students, but if you're here about my relationship with Albus Dumbledore… I'm afraid I cannot help you." Harry had to conceal a smile.

"Oh sir, I'm here for so much more than that!" Harry assured him with false concern. "I don't mean to offend or push you. My interest is purely academic and professional. Though I'd love to hear about how you and Headmaster Dumbledore became friends, and how you get on now, you needn't feel pressured to share!"

"I appreciate that." Slughorn nodded tersely. "If you have questions unrelated to Dumbledore, I'd be happy to–"

"If I may, I just have *one* question regarding Headmaster Dumbledore." Harry said quickly. "I assure you, it's nothing too personal. I asked all of the Professors I've interviewed a similar question, so it's not just you! I'm looking to better my understanding of Hogwarts, and people like you help more than you could ever know." Slughorn stared at Harry for a moment, contemplating.

"Just one question?"

"Just the one."

"I see." Slughorn pursed his lips for a moment. "I suppose… Well alright. One question."

"Oh, thank you!" Harry enthused. "Okay. Now. I asked the previous Professors what their current relationship with Headmaster Dumbledore was, and whether they still entertained his company after they left Hogwarts. From your previous answers, I can estimate that you have the same answer for me that all the others did." Slughorn's eyebrows went up at that. Harry pushed on. "None of them are still in contact with Headmaster Dumbledore, nor do they maintain any significant friendship with him. If asked, I believe you would give me the same answer. So that's not my question for you."

"And what *is* your question, dare I ask?" Harry took a deep breath. He really hoped Slughorn didn't kick him out for asking this…

“Would you say that your relationship with Headmaster Dumbledore is negative, or perhaps tense?” Harry said, carefully controlling his expression. “I've noticed you don't want to talk about him, and tend to skate around questions regarding him. Is this because you have an unsteady relationship that keeps you at odds?”

“... It is.” Slughorn said slowly. “You are correct. Dumbledore and I were once very close, but as years went on our relationship was… *strained*. We had a disagreement that led to resentment, and that resentment still separates us to this day.”

“I see, that's unfortunate.” Harry said seriously. He was definitely asking more than ‘one question’ at this point. Harry just hoped Slughorn wouldn't notice. “If I may be so bold, was that ‘strain’ you mentioned due to the presence of a certain student?”

“Why do you ask?” Slughorn suddenly looked immensely nervous. Harry pretended not to notice and just kept going.

“It's just something a couple of your fellow Professors referenced, a student who you and Headmaster Dumbledore were at odds about. A student named Tom Riddle.” Harry continued. “Tom Riddle, as described to me by multiple sources, was a brilliant student with top marks and a chivalrous personality. Healer Merrythought stated Tom Riddle was one of your favorite students back in the day, Professor. She confided that you spoke often of his talents, and you hoped he'd pursue a career in the Ministry for his intelligence and ambition. I heard similar stories from the Herbology Professor you worked alongside for many years, Herbert Beery? He fondly recounted to me how Mister Riddle was a star at Hogwarts, a real prodigy, one whom you were more than happy to openly support and encourage.” Slughorn opened his mouth, clearly meaning to steer the conversation off-course, but Harry wasn't done.

“According to your old coworkers, Tom Riddle was one of your favorite students, and you saw fit to be a sort of mentor during his time at Hogwarts. But I was also told Headmaster Dumbledore saw Riddle in a much different light - he thought Riddle was a troublemaker. Despite Headmaster Dumbledore's accusations, which were made rather frequently and without any visible evidence, you and the other Professors continued to support Riddle through his years at Hogwarts. He went on to win many awards, as I understand it.

“Knowing this, it's sensible to theorize that Headmaster Dumbledore's disdain towards one of your favored students would cause tension.”

Harry said. Slughorn seemed to be growing more and more still as Harry spoke. “So, to bring us back to my question. Was your falling out with Headmaster Dumbledore related at all to Tom Riddle?”

Slughorn was silent for a moment when Harry finished. Which made sense. It probably wasn't every day a random ‘journalist’ interrogated him about the past he'd buried deep behind him. From the sounds of it, Slughorn was running from whatever happened between him, Dumbledore and Tom Riddle. If Harry could just figure out what went down, maybe he'd finally have the answers he needed and how it was tied to his current situation with the dreams and the Prophecy and Dumbledore's secrecy.

“Let me ask *you* one question.” Slughorn's voice wasn't cheerful anymore. His eyes were sharp and his voice was serious. “Are you reporting back to someone? Dumbledore, perhaps? Or is this just a sham of an interview trying to dig into my personal business? Why are you really here, Mister Cork? Tell me the truth.”

Harry took a deep breath. He'd prepared to answer that question, luckily. Professor Merrythought asked him the same one. With her he'd stumbled through embarrassment, unable to answer confidently, but Merrythought just laughed and said she was messing with him. But it was different this time. Harry was glad he had an answer ready to go, because Slughorn was dead serious.

“Professor, I'm just here to learn. I don't work for anyone, I'm unaffiliated with any individual, corporation, or business, and I certainly don't report back to anyone what I hear or learn.” Harry met Slughorn's eyes and tried to properly convey his sincerity. “There are so many secrets at Hogwarts, yet so few answers. I chose to be a journalist, one of the least respected positions out there, because I have this gnawing urge inside me to *know*. I don't spend my free time talking to people like you because someone paid me to. I ask questions because I'm curious, I interview people because I want to listen, and I keep asking until I get my answers. Professor, I am an individual seeking the truth, that's all.”

For a moment they just stared at each other.

“You remind me of him just a bit.” Slughorn said softly. Harry blinked.

“Of who?”

“Tom.” Slughorn sighed, running a hand down his face tiredly. “Tom

Riddle. He was such a marvelous student. He had talent I'd never seen before, and there's not been a single student I've taught like him since. Tom was a once in a lifetime student, and I'm afraid I wasn't the best mentor for him as I could've been. I did not see where he was headed…"

Slughorn fell silent for a time. Terrified he'd somehow break the fragility of the moment, Harry said nothing and waited. He could scarcely breathe with how carefully he was listening.

"It is not something I am proud of, you understand." Slughorn said finally. "But I… Well, to put it vaguely, I discussed a piece of dark magic with Tom that I should not have. He was curious, and educating students is what a good teacher and supportive mentor does. So when Tom asked me… I answered. It was quite possibly the worst mistake of my life, and I regret it to this day. I've buried it in my memories, smothered it, but still it haunts me…" Harry didn't even dare write notes, though he desperately wanted to remember every word, fearing the gentle scratching of his quill would snap Slughorn out of whatever trance he was in.

Slughorn blew out a breath. "Albus, many years later, brought up the conversation I'd long since buried and tried to erase. Why, I was so aghast by the suddenness I panicked. I nearly Obliviated myself with shame. That may seem dramatic to you, but when Albus asked me for the exact memory of that day, of that very conversation, I *genuinely* feared for my life. After that conversation, I retired. I left Hogwarts, teaching, and Dumbledore, behind me. I've worked so hard since then to keep my distance, to protect my mistake and prevent anyone from knowing it, but… I suppose it was bound to come out one way or another."

"You see, after a meeting with my Slug Club, Tom stayed after to ask me a question." Slughorn chewed his lip anxiously as he spoke. "He wanted to know about a particularly rare, practically unheard of magic. A very evil, unstable, dangerous type of magic. I thought it odd he was asking, but never did it occur to me that he would use the knowledge to do evil."

"... What was the magic?" Harry asked, soft and breathless.

"Horcruxes." Slughorn's eyes fell shut. To Harry's surprise, his expression was filled with *grief*. Sad, longing, grieving lines cut into his face like tears in aged seams. "I told him, a Horcrux is a magical object that contains a piece of one's very soul. One would split their

soul and hide a fragment outside of their body, to keep it safe. Then, even if one's body is attacked or destroyed, one cannot die, for part of the soul remains earthbound and undamaged. Looking back, I realize now that he was afraid. Tom was terrified of death, and what might happen if he were vulnerable."

"But I warned him, to create a Horcrux was to damn yourself forever. To exist in such a state, split into so many pieces, would be a fate worse than death. If all that is left of a person is a tiny fragment of themselves, tucked away in a book or carried inside jewelery, the pain it dealt would have them wish for death, mercy, to save them from the unending agony. That person would be little more than a wraith, cursed to remain alive but untethered, aware but unable to again be really *human*."

"There are very few times in my life where I've truly regretted something I'd done, but that conversation was one of them." Slughorn opened his eyes. Harry was stunned to see tears glistening there. "I should not have shared that information with him, and if Albus knew what I'd done…" Slughorn shuddered. He then wiped his damp eyes, facing Harry with a sniff. "So there you have it. I do apologise, I've forgotten what your actual question was."

"No, that answered my questions perfectly." Harry heard himself say. "Thank you, Professor."

Vaguely, Harry knew Slughorn said something like "Goodness, look at the time!" and ushered him out immediately, blubbering about something to distract himself or Harry or both as he pushed Harry out. Harry knew he thanked the man at some point for entertaining the interview, but his motions were on autopilot as he tried and failed to comprehend the information offered to him.

Horcruxes. Split souls. Wraiths. Alive but not really human. Tom Riddle. Voldemort. *Horcruxes*.

It made so much sense. The Diary! Tom Riddle's Diary was a Horcrux! It quite literally contained a piece of his soul and kept Voldemort tethered to life, even in death. That also explained why he was a parasite living off Quirrell's head back in first year, and why he just evaporated into a hazy smoke when Quirrell died! He had no form, no substance, no *life.* It wasn't until Wormtail dropped him in that gruesome mixture of magic that Voldemort was able to be anything close to human again - not that looking more like a snake than human really counted, but still.

But there was another thing scratching at Harry's thoughts. It was an itch in the back of his mind that he just couldn't quite reach to identify. But Harry knew once he figured it out… nothing would be the same.

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It wasn't even two days later that Harry ended up in Knockturn Alley, looking around for the library. He'd been in Knockturn a time or two before, but he'd been exploring more than actively searching for something. Harry, though he had to ask directions from a very sketchy looking vampire, eventually found a massive library that looked straight out of a dark fairytale.

During his time researching, Harry constantly battled his prejudiced thoughts that nagged at him whenever a banshee or vampire or otherwise suspicious figure strolled along beside him between the aisle of the vast library. He had to remind himself that ‘dark’ and ‘evil’ weren't the same. Sure there was some overlap correlation, but Harry hadn't looked into that enough to really know the facts. So he just tried to put it on the back burner and remember to look more into what ‘dark’ and ‘light’ really meant - it seemed an important thing to learn, in Harry's opinion.

Harry spent three days scouring that library. He searched every aisle, every shelf, every spine in his search. In the entire place, he found only two books that had information on Horcruxes. Slughorn wasn't kidding when he said it was rare and dangerous. Apparently not even the evil people had a lot of information on it. Wait, no, not evil, Harry reminded himself, just *dark*. In any case, the information was hard to come by.

But that didn't mean he didn't find anything. In fact, Harry found exactly what he was looking for.

> *Not only is it magically and physically dangerous for the caster, it is legally dangerous as well. Creating Horcruxes is an illegal act worldwide, and if discovered will result in life in Azkaban. Being unable to die, the jailed witch or wizard would live forever in torment of the Dementors standing guard.*

In addition to that fate, the Ministry of Magic would send out a team of Unspeakables to hunt down any and all Horcruxes created by the guilty individual. They will destroy any Horcrux objects and kill any Horcrux hosts, not stopping their search until the jailed witch or wizard is without their evil, severed protections. Oftentimes, the jailed witch or wizard perished soon after as well. Creating a Horcrux, if caught, is a death sentence.

And there it was. One sentence in some random book in a dark library on the wrong side of the Leaky Cauldron led Harry to the worst realization of his life.

He was a Horcrux.

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Harry didn't know how he managed it, but he very calmly dressed in his disguise, straightened his beanie, donned those horrid blue contacts, and knocked on Slughorn's door. He carried no clipboard, no notebook, not even a pen. He came to ask one question and one question only.

“Mister Cork?” Slughorn blinked in surprise when he answered the door. “I thought we'd spoken enough the last time you were here!”

“Sir, I just have one question.” Harry, despite his outward calmness, couldn't mask the pleading in his voice. “It's about the Horcruxes. I looked into them to get more information, to widen my knowledge to properly understand the story you were telling of course, and I came across a terrifying thing. I was only wondering if you could confirm what I've read.”

“And what is it that you have read?”

“That Horcruxes don't have to just be objects. They can be within *hosts.*” Harry's throat closed. His voice came out slightly choked as he continued. “Is it possible… Can a person be a Horcrux? At first I thought they meant animals, pets maybe, but now I'm not so sure. Could a human being be forced to carry a shard of someone's soul without their knowledge? Could a *person,* a living breathing human,

be a Horcrux?"

Slughorn looked confused, but there was also pity in his eyes. Honesty, Harry could take some pity if it meant he got his answers. He needed to know - this was quite literally a life or death situation.

"Yes, it is possible." Slughorn confirmed, voice soft yet damning. "Though I don't know what kind of effects it would have on the host, I can't imagine it would be a good kind of connection. It might even kill them eventually."

"Oh God." Harry choked. His heart raced in his chest. The worst part? Dumbledore *knew.* He just about told Harry as much after the Basilisk incident! Dumbledore told him that Harry carried a sliver of Voldemort inside him, and that was where he got his Parseltongue ability. Harry remembered so vividly because at the time he worried it meant he was destined to walk in Voldemort's footsteps - and maybe it was true, if Harry's fate was so tied to Voldemort.

"If I may, Mister Cork…" Slughorn stepped forward and put a hand on Harry's shoulder, offering him a weak smile. "Perhaps, you'd best find a different thing to research."

"Yeah…" Harry swallowed thickly. "That sounds like a good idea."

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Dumbledore,

I know you're ignoring me, but this is important. I have learned I am a Horcrux. I've been having strange dreams of rituals and dark hallways and laughter, and assumed they were just dreams.
Eventually, Lord Voldemort was speaking to me. Whispering in my ear and telling me I was a Horcrux and that I was a mistake and needed to die for him to create more.
I want an explanation for this. Do I really have to die? Did you know? Is this why you haven't been writing to me? Do you think I'm cursed or tainted?

Respond this time,

Harry Potter

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My dear boy,

A Horcrux is a powerful object that holds the soul of another person, giving them immortality. Yes, you carry a piece of Voldemort's soul. It is a heavy burden you must bear.
When it is time, all the Horcruxes must be destroyed. You must understand Harry, your sacrifice will save thousands of lives. Once you have destroyed all the Horcruxes, you must give yourself up. Only then, can this war be ended.
Do not worry for your friends. They are safe with me, and you are safe at the Dursleys. The wards here prevent them from sending owls, but they will see you at King's Cross in September. Stay vigilant.

With love and faith,
Dumbledore

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After that, so much changed so quickly Harry could barely keep up. Before he knew it, he was running away from Privet Drive yet again. Though, this time Harry was sure there was no going back.

Harry, underneath his Invisibility Cloak, watched the Dursleys eat their dinner. Petunia was smiling at Dudley, though he looked to be complaining about the dinner she served, while Vernon discussed an important work meeting coming up and how investors would be there and how looking good in front of them could get them to fund a new thing they were trying to do. They weren't putting aside a pitiful can of soup to squeeze through the catflap on Harry's door, they weren't complaining about how annoying Harry's owl was when Hedwig

wasn't given enough time to fly around, they weren't shouting for Harry to clean up the plates. He literally didn't exist to them.

Looking down at his hands, Harry tried to ignore the faint trembling now present. *It was an accident.* Harry hadn't meant to erase himself. He didn't mean it. He was just scared, he hadn't even been holding his wand. It was supposed to be safe! Nobody did Wandless magic! Except for Dumbledore and Voldemort, but knowing what he did now Harry didn't want to be like either of them!

What was worse, Harry was felt true fear take root deep in his chest as he collected his things and left Privet Drive behind him. What would Dumbledore say? Not that Harry was going to tell him. Ever. That was also why Harry was taking Muggle transportation to London instead of the Knight Bus; if he didn't use any magical means, Dumbledore couldn't find him. In theory, anyway.

So much had changed, Harry didn't know what he was going to do. Dumbledore wanted him dead, Voldemort wanted him dead, Ron and Hermione were ignoring his owls, and apparently he was Horcrux on top of it all. He just felt so *alone…*

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Not even two months later Harry Potter ended up at the center of a revolution, and his Wraiths would ensure he was never alone again.

Chapter End Notes

> GUYS IM SO EXCITED. Thank you so much for all the enthusiasm and excitement, it really helps me stay motivated to write and continue this fun story. You guys are awesome!!
>
> Now, who's ready?!?

A Start to the Year

Chapter Summary

Harry and his friends welcome the new students.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys!! We're here with the second chapter of this work, and this is the kickstart for the fic! I hope you all enjoy, and thank you to everyone supporting me in the comments!!

Enjoy ♡♡

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Two

Welcome

“Welcome to Gryffindor.” Hermione smiled out at the small group of first years, voice gentle. “We as Gryffindors strive to be brave, stubborn, and loyal to those around us. The Hat put you here because it believes in you, so I hope you all strive to believe in *yourself* just like it does. Hogwarts is just the beginning of your journey, so enjoy it, and use everything it offers you to build yourself up.”

“We as your House may be a great support for you while you're here at school, but that doesn't mean we'll be the only support you have.” Ron said. He had a hand around Hermione's waist as he faced the ten new students, grinning brightly. “The other Houses also have support to offer you. The Hufflepuffs will show you how to work hard, how to push through anything. The Ravenclaws can teach you how to study, not just school but your own interests that capture your attention. The Slytherins can show you how to reach your highest potential, growing to the great person we all know you can be. So don't be afraid to get to know everyone here at Hogwarts. We all share the same collective mindset of *unity*. Because we are all in this together.”

“You may have heard silly rumors that Gryffindors are always brave, Hufflepuffs are always lazy, Ravenclaws are always stuck up, and Slytherins are always self-centered, but that's not really true.” Hermione continued. “We are all our own people, yeah? It'd be pretty

silly if we Gryffindors were all the exact same person and personality, don't you think?" A couple first years giggled, others rolled their eyes. "Those are just silly superstitions and fairytales that don't necessarily ring true here at Hogwarts. So keep in mind, don't judge others just based on House."

"But feel free to judge based on personality, or behavior." Ron added with a grin. "Sometimes we just don't like people. And that's fine, just don't talk to them if you don't want to. Make sense?" The first years nodded their understanding.

Harry, leaning against the far wall near the bookshelf, watched on with a little smile. As sixth year Prefects, Ron and Hermione suddenly had a lot more responsibilities thrust onto them. One of which was introducing the first years to Gryffindor and to Hogwarts, which, in Harry's opinion, they were really good at. They were so genuine and relaxed, it was clear the eleven year old listeners were put at ease by it.

He was also proud Ron and Hermione included House unity as a priority. They'd worked so hard to create a cohesive relationship between all the Houses in their previous year, promoting the idea that individuals matter more than their House, but there was still a certain stigma surrounding the four Houses *outside* the school they couldn't change just yet; but they'd get there eventually. But the first step was educating the next generation. They were the future, after all.

"They make good Prefects." Seamus noted. Harry looked over to see Dean was seated on a plush chair, while Seamus had flopped himself over the back of it, wrapping his arms around Dean. That wasn't the weird part; the weird part was the fact that Seamus' robe was on backwards and he was wearing a baseball cap supporting some Muggle football team that clashed horribly.

"You look ridiculous." Harry commented, one eyebrow raised.

"Obviously." Seamus said with a sideways grin. "How else am I to introduce myself to the first years on their first morning as Gryffindors?"

"Gotta admit, it's pretty statement-y." Dean said to Harry. "Properly illustrates this dunce's manners."

"Hey!" Seamus exclaimed. "I am positively offended by the insinuation that I have manners." Dean laughed.

“My bad.” He said with a grin. “Next time I'll be sure to make note of your incivility.”

“You do that.” Seamus said with an exaggerated huff. Harry just laughed.

“But I agree.” Harry said. “They do make good Prefects.” Though Harry disliked giving their previous Headmaster any compliments, Dumbledore made the right call making Ron and Hermione Prefects; they were natural leaders once given the opportunity.

Turning back to watch Ron and Hermione, Harry listened as they wrapped up their little speech.

“And please keep in mind, the world doesn't end if you lose us some House points.” Hermione was saying, pointing to the clipboard by the door. “It happens sometimes.”

The board had a constant running tracker on their House points, magically updating when points were lost or added in real time. By the end of the year, the board looked a little like a massive maths problem with endless additions and subtractions totalled at the bottom for them.

“Just do your best to succeed in your classes, and you'll earn those points back at some point.” Ron added. “Merlin only knows I've lost a lot of points over the years, but I've also earned a fair few back with… good behavior.” Ron and Hermione shared a look which Harry interpreted to be a bit of a correction. It was more *‘unfair favoritism’* than ‘good behavior’ that earned them so many points.

“And lastly!” Hermione clapped her hands together with a grin. “Breakfast will be starting soon, and schedules will be handed out by our Head of House during the meal. I know a lot of you have questions regarding your classes and schedule, so feel free to ask once you've got your schedules. We're happy to answer any questions you've got.”

The first years quickly started moving at the mention of breakfast, only a few staying where they were in the Common Room. That freed Ron and Hermione to wander over towards them.

“How did we do?” Hermione asked immediately, anxiety present in wide brown eyes. “Was that alright?”

“That was perfect, Mione.” Harry assured her with a laugh. “You and

Ron really nailed it."

"I told you so." Ron bumped Hermione's shoulder with his. "Don't worry so much."

"I thought speeches were Harry's thing." Ginny said as she strolled over. "You killed it, Hermione."

"What about me?" Ron raised an eyebrow. Ginny looked him up and down slowly.

"Nope." She said firmly. "You suck." Ron squawked in offense. Everyone else laughed.

"On the topic of speeches, will we be inviting the new first years to our *meetings*?" Seamus asked, straightening a little. "I was looking at them, and they just seem so young."

"The first years were invited last year." Dean pointed out.

"Only because Harry invited literally everyone." Seamus rolled his eyes. "I mean, now that you've got a good group of people already. Are you gonna invite them?"

"I don't think so, no." Harry said with a small frown. "I feel like eleven is just too young. I'm glad I asked the first years before, now that they're second years they can help the new arrivals to understand the whole 'unity' thing. But the new first years coming in don't need to be pulled into all that just yet."

"Should we be worried they'll spill the beans about our *friends*?" Dean frowned. "The second years, I mean."

"I don't think so, no." Harry shook his head. "We talked about keeping our secrets a lot last year, and the whole thing with Lisa… I think they understand the importance of it." They all nodded, falling a bit silent at the reminder of Lisa.

Lisa had caused a real problem for them, outing Harry and Tom and the Wraiths to fucking *Umbridge* of all people. Because of it Snape ended up erasing Lisa's memory of that entire year, which meant she was repeating her fifth year now. Harry wished he could've stopped it from happening, but at the same time it did solve the whole Umbridge problem. Tom easily modified Umbridge's memory, and after a very short trial Umbridge was sent straight to Azkaban for 'attacking a student' and causing 'irreparable memory damage'. It also paved the

way for McGonagall to become Headmistress, which was a massive improvement. With Dumbledore out of the castle, hopefully Harry and his Wraiths could move and speak more freely. They would still need to be extremely careful, though.

“Well then that's good.” Hermione said, clearing her throat. “If the second years can help integrate the new students into their friendship circles, encouraging Inter-House Friendships, then that's one fewer thing for us to worry about.”

“Very true.” Ron nodded, taking her hand with a little smile. “It'll all work out.”

“Ew.” Seamus stuck his tongue out at Ron affectionately kissing Hermione's brow. “PDA, man.”

“Come off it.” Ron scowled playfully.

“Anyway! Who's looking forward to their class schedules??” Hermione said hurriedly, diverting attention.

“I am.” Ginny grinned. “I want to know in which order my classes are gonna murder me.”

“You'll do fine.” Ron rolled his eyes. “It's us you should be worried about. We're taking our N.E.W.T-level classes!”

“Don't remind me.” Harry groaned. “That's gonna suck. I just hope our Professors go easy on us.” He paused to think about it a second, then sighed. “Nevermind, I know for a fact McGonagall and Snape won't hesitate.”

“We don't know what Slughorn's gonna be like.” Hermione hummed. “I wonder if he's any good at Potions.”

“He better be.” Ron said. “I mean, Professor McGonagall hired him herself, right?”

“Snape picked him, actually.” Harry corrected. The group looked at Harry in surprise. “McGonagall told Snape he could be the Defense Professor if he found a replacement. Ergo, Snape picked Slughorn.”

“That… actually makes sense.” Dean said thoughtfully. “Nicely deduced.” Seamus nodded as well.

“Wasn't Slughorn the Professor when Snape was a student?” Hermione

blinked.

“Yep.” Harry confirmed. “That probably contributed a bit. But mostly I think Snape was just in a hurry to find a replacement. He *really* wants to teach Defense.”

“That reminds me!” Hermione exclaimed. “Are you going to continue teaching lessons to the students this year, Harry? I know you enjoyed it.”

“Well, I was only doing it because Umbridge wasn't. Like a substitute.” Harry said. “With Snape teaching, I'm not sure it'll be needed.”

“You could always just wait and see.” Ginny shrugged, pulling on loose ginger strands falling from her ponytail. “If Professor Snape sucks as much ass teaching Defense as he did Potions, we'd much rather have you.”

“Ginny!” Hermione hissed scoldingly, “Language! There are small ears in the room.” Ginny just stuck her tongue out at Hermione with a teasing grin.

“Hey, Mister Harry.” Jason Swann, one of the kids Harry regularly taught during his lessons after Wraith meetings, stepped up and caught his attention. “Sorry, are you busy?”

“Not at all.” Harry said, stepping away from his friends just a little. “What's up?”

“Well, would you be able to help my little sister with some spells, just like you helped me?” Swann was clearly nervous, but he was nevertheless speaking clearly and firmly. “She's only a second year, but she's real powerful and I wanna make sure she's properly challenged. I worry classes won't be enough to keep her engaged.”

“Oh, sure.” Harry blinked. “I'd love to. Only, you don't have to call me Mister Harry, remember.” Harry had sometimes been called ‘Mister Harry’ by the younger years during those training sessions the prior year, but he kept telling them the title wasn't necessary.

“Habit now, Mister Harry.” Swann grinned a bit crookedly. “You're stuck with it now, I'm afraid.”

“Hey Jae!” Allison Barnes, another fourth year Gryffindor, called from across the room. “You coming down with us?”

“Sorry to interrupt, Mister Harry!” Nick Alas, her grinning best friend, shouted as well. Harry just sighed fondly.

“Go on then.” Harry said to Swann, “Don't keep your friends waiting.”

“See you later, Mister Harry!” Swann waved as he jogged over to his friends, joining them at the portrait door as they left. Harry shook his head with a fond smile.

“They were some of your students, right?” Neville asked, straightening his tie as he walked up. “From last year.”

“Yeah, Swann used to attend every session and ask for help on the Freezing Charm.” Harry confirmed. “Those two would always stay behind and pretend to be working, but they were just there to not so subtly support him.”

“That's nice of them.” Neville said with a smile. “I'm glad he's got support.” Harry nodded in agreement.

“Well, we should be heading down too.” Hermione said, checking her wristwatch. “Breakfast has started already.”

“Oh shit, I told Luna I'd sit with her!” Ginny exclaimed. “I've gotta go. Bye!”

“Language!” Hermione called after her, this time more teasing than scolding. Ginny briefly glanced back only to flip Hermione off on her way out the door.

“I thought we agreed we'd be sitting at our assigned tables at the start of the year.” Neville said mildly. “To help the first years adjust to having a House of their own, and offer support.”

“Yeah well, it's Ginny. What were we expecting, really.” Hermione sighed. She then side-eyed Ron with a grin. “You know her, just like her *troublesome* brothers. Does whatever she wants all the time.”

“Damn right.” Ron laughed. “Wouldn't have it any other way.” Hermione elbowed him with a laugh of her own.

Harry rolled his eyes. He then paused when he caught sight of a small Gryffindor huddled in a chair all by himself, clutching his knees. Harry frowned.

“You guys can head on down, I'll meet you there.” Harry said. He

waved off their confused looks and made his way over to the boy. He seemed to be crying.

“Hey, are you alright?” Harry asked. He reached out and gently touched the boy's shoulder. “What's wrong?”

“I don't want to be a Gryffindor.” The boy had tears in his wide green eyes as he looked up at Harry, uncurling only slightly.

“Why not?” Harry tilted his head.

“Because my friend is a Slytherin.” The boy sniffed pitifully, wiping his running nose with the sleeve of his robe. “I know the Prefects said we can be friends with anyone, but I really don't know! My Mum told me Slytherins are no good misfits that will only bring me trouble, but Grim is my friend! He's not like that, I know he's not. It's not fair.”

After a moment of thought, Harry remembered bumping into a first year named Grim Farley at Platform 9 ¾ just the day prior. Perhaps it was the same ‘Grim’ this kid knew.

“So you want to be in Slytherin with your friend?” Harry asked.

“Yeah.” The boy said tearfully. “Maybe if we're both Slytherins, and both misfits, maybe Mum will let us be friends.”

“You don't need to share a House to be friends.” Harry told him gently. “That doesn't matter in the slightest.”

“Huh?” The boy blinked. He slid his knees down a little to look up at Harry better. “But no Gryffindors are friends with Slytherins. That just doesn't happen, no matter what the Prefects say.”

“Lemme tell you a secret.” Harry smiled. He knelt down by the chair, leveling himself with the first year. “Some of my *best* friends are Slytherin, and they're amazing people. My Slytherin friends are smart, witty, and when they put their mind to something they get it done. That's what it means to be Slytherin.”

“What?” The first year hurriedly pushed brown strands of hair out of his eyes to stare at Harry in disbelief. “But Mum says Slytherins are troublemakers. The whole lot of them.”

“That's just silly superstition.” Harry laughed. “It's not true at all. Here, why don't we head to breakfast and I'll introduce you to my friends. Alright?” The boy hesitated. “I'll be right there with you.”

“... Okay.” Slowly, the boy nodded. “You're sure it's okay to talk to them?”

“Of course!” Harry assured him brightly. “We can all be friends here at Hogwarts, if you want. No House is a bad House, even if people sometimes like to joke about those silly old stereotypes. You could be friends with everyone, if you wanted.”

“I'd like that.” The boy rubbed his eyes again with a little smile.

“What's your name?” Harry asked.

“Cinderford.” He said, clearing his throat of tears. “Brian Cinderford. What's yours?”

“Oh, I'm Harry.” Harry smiled.

“Right, yeah.” Cinderford nodded. “I heard some of the other kids calling you ‘Mister Harry’ earlier.” Harry, unprepared, sputtered a little.

“You don't need to call me that.” Harry assured him quickly. “I'm just Harry. Harry Potter.” Even though he probably should've expected it, Harry was surprised when Cinderford gasped. He really was bad at introducing himself sometimes.

“You're Harry Potter?! *The* Harry Potter!?” Cinderford exclaimed, mouth dropping open in shock. Harry chuckled.

“Yeah, I am. But I'm no one special.” Harry told him. “That whole Chosen One stuff, defeating You-Know-Who? That's just a story for little kids. My parents are the ones who did all that, protecting me like any parent would. That makes a lot more sense, doesn't it?”

“Yeah, I guess.” Cinderford agreed with a slow nod. “That *does* make more sense.”

“Exactly.” Harry smiled. “So, I'm just Harry.”

“But I still think you're important.” Cinderford told him matter of factly.

“What makes you say that?” Harry asked.

“Kids call you ‘Mister Harry’, that sounds pretty important to me.” Cinderford gave him a look. “Y’know, you're pretty humble for someone so special.”

“I suppose I just never thought of myself as someone particularly special.” Harry shrugged. “But that's enough about me, let's head on down to breakfast, yeah?”

“Okay.” Cinderford grinned.

Harry stood, glancing over to briefly give his friends a thumbs up. They were still where he'd left them, watching him and Cinderford with concerned frowns. They seemed to relax a little at Harry's acknowledgment.

To help him relax a little, Harry chatted to Cinderford about the Castle as they walked. The first year seemed especially interested when Harry mentioned the other House Commons.

“You've actually been *inside* the other Common Rooms!?” Cinderford exclaimed, taken aback. “How??”

“I was invited in, of course.” Harry laughed. “My friends and I kinda rotate whose Common Room we hangout in, but mostly it's random.”

“Which one d'you visit most often?”

“Well, probably Slytherin.” Harry hummed, thinking. “I've spent some time in Hufflepuff, mostly for parties, but Slytherin the most. I've spent my fair share in Ravenclaw Tower too, but it's a bit rarer. Only because it's so high up even the Ravenclaws would rather go down to the dungeons for the Slytherin or Hufflepuff Commons, when offered.”

“Is Ravenclaw Tower higher than Gryffindor Tower?” Cinderford asked.

“Much higher.” Harry laughed. “Gryffindor Tower is four floors lower than Ravenclaw Tower. The only part higher in the Castle is the Astronomy Tower.”

“Wow.” Cinderford said, eyes wide. “What's the highest room in the whole Castle?” Harry thought about that for a second.

“Probably the Headmaster's Office.” Harry said finally. “It's a small turret off the Astronomy Tower, and I'm pretty sure it goes higher than the Astronomy classroom and observation deck.”

“That makes sense.” Cinderford said with a nod. “That way the Headmaster can see everything.”

“Very true.” Harry nodded.

Despite easy conversation all the way down the steps and away from Gryffindor Tower, Harry noticed Cinderford's confidence ebbing as they entered the Great Hall. Though he wanted to comfort Cinderford somehow, Harry resisted pointing it out or making a fuss by acknowledging it. Instead Harry just marched right on over to the Slytherin table with a grin.

Theo saw him first, silver eyes rising to meet his as Harry made his way over. He smiled into his book. Soon after, Harry made himself known to everyone else.

“Hiya Draco, Pans.” Harry pressed his hands to the table, leaning down between Draco and Pansy. “How're we doing over here?”

“Hi Harry.” Pansy grinned. “Funny seeing you here.” Harry winked.

“We're just fine, thank you.” Draco drawled. “What brings you over?”

“I've got a Gryffindor here who's looking for a friend.”

“What, yourself?” Draco smirked. Harry rolled his eyes.

“No.” Harry straightened, smiling more gently as he beckoned Cinderford forward. “It's alright. Didn't I tell you? We're all friends over here.”

“Oh, hello.” Draco's expression softened as he met the boy's wide green eyes. “What's your name?”

“Um, Brian Cinderford.” Cinderford said shyly.

“I'm Draco Malfoy, it's a pleasure to meet you.” Draco smiled warmly. “Who is it you're looking for, Brian?”

“My friend, Grim Farley.” Cinderford said quietly, playing with his hands. “We grew up together, and promised to be friends forever. But now he's a Slytherin and I'm a Gryffindor, so I thought we couldn't be friends anymore. But Mister Harry says we can be. Is that true?”

“Absolutely you can be!” Harry enthused. “After all, everyone here is my friend. Right?” Harry pointedly did not acknowledge his friends' various reactions to the address that he was now apparently stuck with: Pansy choked on her juice, Blaise raised a single eyebrow, Daphne snickered behind a hand, and Theo smirked into his

Mathematics textbook.

“Harry's right.” Draco said, clearing his throat against a short laugh. “If you two want to be friends, don't let something as silly as your House stop you. There are much more important things to consider than what some dusty, dirty, *ancient* old Hat labels you as, yeah?” Cinderford giggled a little at that.

“Yeah.” He agreed, smiling.

“Your friend will be down there with the first years.” Draco pointed to the far end of the table, closest to the High Table. “You can go sit with him if you want, alright?”

“Alright.” Cinderford grinned brightly, squared his shoulders, and marched down the aisle.

“Farley?” Blaise spoke up quietly, frowning. “Why does that sound familiar?”

“Gemma Farley.” Pansy told him. “She was the sixth year Prefect that welcomed us to Slytherin. Graduated after our second year.”

“Ohh.” Harry looked down the row at Cinderford anxiously searching for a familiar face. “Huh. He must be her little brother, or something.”

“We never knew her well enough to know if she had siblings.” Pansy shrugged. Harry just hummed an acknowledgement.

Harry watched as Cinderford approached Farley at the end of the table, pulling anxiously at his fingers as he said something to him. They were significantly out of earshot due to the bustling noise of the Great Hall, but after a few short exchanged words Farley stood, grinning, and pulled Cinderford into a tight hug.

It was a little bittersweet seeing them sit down together, shoulder to shoulder with matching grins, and it took a moment for Harry to place why that was.

Harry met Draco's eyes and found the same sad happiness resting there. That could've been them, a Gryffindor and a Slytherin - if things had been different back then, maybe Harry and Draco could've been friends from the start. But it didn't matter much now. They were making sure kids like Cinderford and Farley had the opportunity to be friends in the way Harry and Draco hadn't; House didn't matter one bit, and they would make sure everyone knew that one day.

“I thought we were sitting at our assigned Houses for the start of the year.” Pansy raised an eyebrow at Draco.

“I figured it was fine.” Draco shrugged. “Besides, Ginny's sitting with Luna.” He pointed. They turned to see Ginny sitting at the Ravenclaw table, gesticulating wildly to Luna and the surrounding fifth year Eagles.

“It's Ginny.” Blaise said dryly. “What were you expecting?”

“Touché.” Draco replied.

“You know, we had a near identical conversation just now in the Gryffindor Commons.” Harry told them with a laugh. “I like how we all collectively know Ginny's the sort to do that.”

“She's a Weasley.” Blaise pointed out. “Everybody knows she's as bad as her brothers, if not worse.”

“Though, a year ago, I would've blamed Luna.” Daphne admitted. “Between the two of them, I thought Luna was the crazy one. I was in for a surprise when I actually met them.”

“Can't blame you.” Harry grinned. “Luna's just got a whimsical vibe. It suits Ginny's crackhead energy.”

“That is an excellent way to put that.” Daphne blinked. “Whimsical, and crackhead. I like that.”

Theo caught their attention by closing his textbook and putting it down on the table. “Our schedules are coming around.”

“Finally.” Pansy groaned. “I've been waiting forever!” Harry laughed.

“You'll survive a few more minutes.” Harry told her.

“Potter, you are not a Slytherin.” Snape's voice caught Harry off guard. He turned to see Snape standing nearby, clutching an armful of parchment. “Proceed back to your table to receive your schedule. Now.” Ah, that's probably why Theo announced it like that. Snape, predictably, was handing out their schedules.

“Yessir.” Harry saluted him. Snape's lip twitched into a sneer, which Harry ignored as he turned to his friends with a grin. “See you guys later.” With that he shoved off the table and headed towards the Gryffindors.

Ron and Hermione had saved him a seat, as they always had. Some things never changed. Harry, easily spotting them, headed towards them without hesitating.

“There you are.” Hermione commented as Harry plopped down beside her. “Did everything go okay with that first year?”

“He was just scared about losing a friend to Slytherin.” Harry said. “I reminded him that House didn't matter, and sent him to go say hi to the Slytherins.”

“Then got yourself scolded by Snape.” Ron grinned.

“Nah, just a vaguely bossy warning.” Harry said with a laugh. “I think he's too conflicted to properly scold me. Which, hey, I'm not complaining about.”

“Cheers to that.” Ron agreed.

Harry and his friends happily ate breakfast, their schedules being passed out by Professor Sinistra in McGonagall's stead. It dawned on Harry that they'd be seeing McGonagall less as their Head of House now that she was their Headmistress. Though it made sense, it did make Harry a little sad. She wouldn't be in her warm office anymore if her lions needed anything, she'd be up in the Headteacher's Office behind a password guarded gargoyle.

Things were changing, for better or worse. Maybe both. Regardless, Harry's sixth year had officially begun.

Chapter End Notes

Okay guys, we're getting started!! I'm so excited about this, and all the support has been a huge motivator!!

Also, as you probably noticed, a snuck some throwback information in there; that'll be a reoccurring thing for awhile to ensure nobody gets confused! The fic ended so long ago, so I bet a few of you need some reminders to big plot points and what exactly went down in the first fic. Don't worry, I'll make sure we're always on the same page! And, if you do forget something or just get confused, drop a comment below and I'll happily answer!

Thank you for reading ♡♡♡

Professor Snape's New Class

Chapter Summary

Harry attends Defence Against the Dark Arts, then recieves worrying news.

Chapter Notes

Hey everyone!! Happy Tuesday and welcome to another chapter. I'm so excited for the start of the plot to kick off!!

I hope you enjoy! ♡♡

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Three

Defence Against the Dark Arts

Harry examined his schedule, eyeing it closely to see what classes McGonagall had approved for him to take. It seemed he'd be taking N.E.W.T. level classes for Charms, Defense, Herbology, Transfiguration, and Potions. All the classes he'd signed up for. And Harry was relieved to see he'd been allowed to drop both Care of Magical Creatures and Divination. Divination for obvious reasons, and Care because Hagrid was just so complicated these days.

“I feel like our schedule is so empty now.” Harry said absently. “We've got a free period directly following breakfast, another after break, and *another* after lunch.” Typically in a day they had two classes in a row after breakfast, followed by a small fifteen minute break, then one more class before Lunch. After lunch were two more classes, another break, and one more class before dinner. Except apparently Harry, Ron, and a handful of their other six year friends had a lot of free time on their hands now.

“What are we meant to do with so much free time?” Harry hummed, mostly to himself. “Just… chill?”

“Take over the world?” Ron suggested, raising his eyebrows. Harry smacked his shoulder in lieu of response. “Though, I am torn between feeling bad for Hermione for having so many classes, or rubbing it in

her face."

"Oh yeah, she's got Ancient Runes right now." Harry remembered. "So that's why she rushed off after breakfast."

"Yepp." Ron nodded. "But she's got the same free period we've got after lunch."

"Sweet." Harry grinned.

"Harry!!" Out of the blue appeared Katie Bell, thick brown curls swinging as she practically jumped him as they entered the Common Room. "You made Quidditch Captain! Oh, I knew you would!"

"Yeah, I did." Harry laughed. He had the Captain badge pinned to his robes.

"Let me know when you schedule those tryouts!" Katie enthused. "I wanna prove my stuff to you as our new Captain."

"I already know you're good, Katie. *Really* good." Harry said, rolling his eyes a little. "But I will. It'll be fun to watch you show off in front of all the new players we'll be getting." Harry, Ron, and Katie were the only players left on the team. Everyone else had either dropped out (shoutout to the Weasley twins!) or graduated, which meant they'd need a dedicated tryout day to choose talented students to fill all the necessary positions.

"I'll be there." Ginny called from across the room, grinning at them.

"You will?" Harry tilted his head. "What position?"

"Chaser." Ginny said. "I've been practicing with my brothers, so I'm confident I can keep up."

"We'll see about that." Katie grinned, a challenge. Ginny just grinned right back.

"I'll expect you both at tryouts, then." Harry laughed.

"D'you think any of the younger years will make the team?" Ron asked. "You were the youngest ever, but a couple second years have made the team before."

"If they're good enough, sure." Harry replied with a shrug. "And if a first year makes the team I'll make sure they get their hands on a broom."

“That's pretty bold of you.” Ron smiled. “I like it.”

Too soon their free period ended and it was time to head down to Defense Against the Dark Arts. Harry hadn't really thought that much about Snape's teaching methods lately, or how they'd transfer over to becoming a Defense Professor. And aside from small conversations here and there, Harry hadn't really discussed it with his friends either. Snape was complicated in lots of ways, especially when it came to his role as Harry's Professor.

Before Harry sent that letter to Voldemort proposing their alliance, before ‘Voldemort’ became ‘Tom’, before Snape got the surprise of his life finding out Harry was actually the mysterious ‘Speaker’ allied with Tom, before the crazy mess that was everything that followed, Snape had absolutely *despised* Harry. Snape went out of his way to sabotage Harry's learning, grade marks, and patience; Snape was just another Slytherin bully Harry had to put up with. But now, like so many other Slytherins, Snape miraculously had a change of heart.

Except that the Slytherins Harry's age ended up becoming some of his closest friends, and Snape became a reluctant ally that was both impressed and intimidated by Harry's authority. Not exactly a great dynamic for an easy, or even *functional,* student-teacher relationship.

When they'd descended all four floors and arrived at the correct classroom, Hermione and Theo and a handful of others were waiting outside already. Hermione, oddly enough, was carrying an armful of books with her bookbag awkwardly hanging off her elbow.

“Woah, you look swamped.” Harry said to Hermione. Hermione huffed, blowing a frizzy coil out of her face. Theo at her side smiled a little as she struggled.

“We're drowning in homework and it’s only been one class!” Hermione exclaimed, flustered by her armful of heavy books. “A fifteen inch essay, two translations, and I’ve got to read all these books by Wednesday!” Harry winced. That only gave her three days, and she was lugging around what looked to be six massive tomes on Ancient Runes.

“I do not envy you.” Ron whistled.

“Theo?” Harry raised an eyebrow. “Where’s your bookload?”

“I didn't feel the need to bring them with me to class.” Theo shrugged. “I left them in my dorm.”

“Smartass.” Hermione muttered. Theo just smiled at her angelically.

“We can set up a study sesh later, if you want.” Ron suggested. “I'd bet on at least a dozen people wanting in on a study group, especially so early in the year. It makes them think they can get ahead.”

“Maybe.” Hermione blew out a heavy breath. “Right now I think I just need to focus on our next class.”

“Let me know if there's anything I can do to help.” Ron said, offering a warm smile. Hermione ducked her head shyly, but nodded.

“Let's cross our fingers Snape isn't gonna dump any more reading on us.” Hermione said. “I'm not sure I could do it without staying up all night to get it done. And so early into the year!”

“Goodness, why so many books??” Pansy strode up, a small group of Slytherins behind her.

“Required reading.” Hermione said, hefting them up as they slipped a little.

“Okay, no, no. Hand them over.” Pansy immediately stepped forward. “Give.”

“I don't need help!” Hermione said, quite predictably. Pansy didn't seem to care. “Oh! Hey–!” Half the books were stolen from Hermione. Pansy tucked them under one arm and grinned. “I need those!” Hermione exclaimed, awkwardly trying to take them back despite still carrying three books.

“And you'll get them back after class.” Pansy rolled her eyes. “But lugging them around all together like that? You'll just throw out your poor back, ‘Mione.”

“Fine.” Hermione huffed. “Pushy, pushy.” Pansy just laughed.

“I'm suddenly glad I didn't sign up for Runes.” Draco said, eyeing the girls with amusement.

“Why didn't you?” Harry asked.

“I figured I wouldn't need a N.E.W.T. in it.” Draco shrugged. “I'm content with just earning my O.W.L. last year. Besides, I never really loved that class.”

“Fair.” Ron said. “This lot's just full of overachievers.”

“Hey!” Hermione exclaimed indignantly; at the same time Theo said, “Guilty.”

They all paused as the door to the classroom swung open. Snape appeared in the doorway, eyeing the crowd of students. “Inside.” Snape ordered quietly. He then stepped out of the way, allowing the students to shuffle into the classroom.

Harry took the chance to look around the room, examining Snape’s teaching space. Every Professor decorated their classroom differently, and it was glaringly obvious with the Defence classroom because they’d had so many Professors and, therefore, so many different variations of the classroom. Snape’s choices heavily contrasted Umbridge’s from the previous year, but it vaguely reminded Harry of how Mad-Eye-Crouch-Jr-Moody decorated his version of the room.

The room was dim, not unlike how dim the Potions room had been; The windows were covered with dark curtains, the room’s only light being a handful of candles floating around the room. Pictures adorning the walls depicting gruesome images that had a couple students shying away. They were still pictures, unmoving to permanently display expressions of terror and pain with maiming, gorey injuries and twisted limbs. The shadowy room quieted any bustle or noise the students made as they took their seats.

Hermione tactfully sat next to Pansy, kicking her slightly in prompt. Pansy huffed, silently passing Hermione the three books she’d confiscated.

“Books away.” Snape announced, closing the door and moving to stand behind his desk at the front of the room. “I wish for your utmost attention, for I have much to say.” With a slight fumble, Hermione and Pansy shoved the heavy books under Hermione’s desk. Pansy looked amused while Hermione looked slightly mortified.

Snape leaned his palms on his desk, dark eyes sweeping around the room slowly. “Thus far you all have entertained five Defence Against the Dark Arts Professors, all of which practiced their own methods and priorities. Because of this confusion put before you, I am surprised so many of you managed extraordinary O.W.L results. Though, perhaps that’s not a surprise at all…” Snape met Harry’s eyes and lingered there a beat too long. Harry barely restrained a grin. “In any case, I shall be even more surprised if any of you keep on top of your work in this class due to the increased level of difficulty in a N.E.W.T. level class. What you learn in this classroom will be advanced, and possibly

even dangerous. So do your utmost best to *pay attention*." Snape moved to slowly pace the room, everyone's eyes following his motions and swishing robe.

"The Dark Arts, as a whole, are many in number, varied in kind, ever-changing and eternal." Snape said softly, voice carrying in the silent room. "Fighting against it is like fighting a many-headed monster, two heads sprouting where one is cut, each new head cleverer and fiercer than the last, becoming twice as dangerous if combatted or used poorly. Your defenses must therefore be flexible and inventive as the Arts you seek to overcome. The pictures decorated the walls depict victims of the Dark Arts, each representing an aspect of torment they can cause. An example of the evil of suffering."

"The Cruciatus Curse," Snape gestured to a picture - a woman screaming, clutching her chest as she was crumpling in on herself, "the Dementor's Kiss," framed in black emptiness was a man, painted blank-eyed and empty, no life behind those dull eyes, "even the aggression of a provoked Inferi," the last picture Snape's flourishing hand drew their gaze to a portrait that seemed to only been a mass of blood and gore strewn across the painted area. "The Dark Arts knows no limits, which means you must overcome your own limits if you wish to combat them effectively."

"Now." Snape had orbited the entire room and returned to his desk, again facing all of them seriously. "None of your previous Professors bothered to teach you the advantages of nonverbal spells. Can someone guess what one such advantage might be?" Hands went up around the classroom, nearly every person prepared to answer. Harry could almost see genuine confusion or surprise in Snape's black eyes. "Very well, Longbottom?" Neville seemed shocked he was picked, but that's probably why Snape did it. Snape didn't really believe Neville would know.

"Because your enemy doesn't know what you're casting." Neville said, clearing his throat slightly to hide the slight tremor in his voice. "It gives you a small advantage because they're not expecting your attack. But it also goes the other way, so always use extra caution when fighting against opponents also casting nonverbally."

"… Correct." Snape murmured, eyeing Neville significantly. Snape's eyes then traveled back to Harry. "It seems you perhaps *did* have a teacher demonstrating nonverbal spells." Harry cracked a smile as Snape tore his gaze from Harry and again addressed the room. "Regardless, yes. Those advanced enough to cast without shouting

incantations gain the element of surprise in their spell-casting, be that defensively or offensively. It is a feat of concentration and will of the mind." Snape paused, assessing if they were all paying attention, then said, "You will now break into pairs. One partner will attempt to jinx the other without speaking, and likewise the other will defend themself with equal silence. You may begin."

Before Harry could even blink, Theo was at his side. "You're with me." Harry blinked, then muffled a snort with his hand.

"Fine with me." Harry whispered in response. Theo's silver eyes flashed with delight as he drew his wand, ready to start immediately. With a smile, Harry drew his in kind. But Harry also took a small second to glance around the room.

In his Defence lessons the previous year, open to every Wraith in every year, he set aside time to teach all of them how to Shield. After that first meeting with Voldemort where the Order had surprised them, interrupting their parley with Voldemort, Harry knew *Protego* was something every single of them had to know. It quite literally saved the lives of Harry and all nine volunteers who risked their own safety to stand at his back with shining faith in him and their cause.

Because of that, nearly everyone seemed to be attempting to use *Protego* as their defensive tactic. The offensive attacks were slightly more varied, but it seemed the Disarming Charm was quite popular. Probably because Harry taught them how to not only cast it, but hold onto their wands if anyone cast it on them. Some of them were very softly murmuring the incantation under their breath instead of casting completely nonverbally, but Harry was still extremely pleased with how much they'd improve and how far they'd come. Once Harry was satisfied knowing everyone was set and working well, he finally turned to meet Theo's anticipatory gaze.

Theo was the kind of caster that had the special ability to cast without any need to move his hand or lose his perfect neutral expression. He did have a tell, though; one Harry noticed that first Defence class Harry taught so long ago. He merely watched and waited until Theo twisted his fingers ever so slightly, almost as if he was merely adjusting his grip, but half a second later a flash of vivid purple was launched at Harry.

Slashing his wand down in a curving arc Harry's *Protego* dissolved the spell and the force of it knocked Theo off balance. He took two stumbled steps back, allowing Harry to blast a red stunner spark his

way. Even off-balance, Theo ducked the spell and thrust his wand out with harsh white flashing at the tip of his beautiful wand. Harry slashed through it again, unbalancing Theo the moment he was finally recovering. But Theo surprised Harry by dropping to the floor with a smooth roll and popping up a distance away, far enough Harry's Protego couldn't reach. Then the real match began.

Dueling Theo was *exhilarating.* Harry was constantly on his toes, dodging and shielding and casting with his blood pulsing through his head as magic poured off him in streaming waves. It was like a dance as they trade spells, not a word uttered between them as they did.

Suddenly Harry felt a wisp of a breeze from behind him and he whipped around, shielding against a spell coming from a new direction. Draco and Hermione, who'd paired together to practice, both had their wands drawn and grins painted across their faces. Harry couldn't help it; he laughed aloud. So then it was Harry against three opponents, silence ringing as Harry's laugh echoed in the quiet room.

Harry had to admit, the onslaught from three opponents overwhelmed him. It was all he could do to defend himself, having no time for offense as he shielded against their alternating attacks. He finally caught a second to breathe as he lunged forward close enough to knock Hermione off her feet with a swelling *Protego*. She tripped backwards with a gasp, knocking into Draco and sending them both to the floor. Harry grinned, turning back to Theo with a triumphant grin and a ready wand.

"That is enough." Theo and Harry paused, turning in surprise to see Snape watching from the shadows of the far corner. In fact, the entire class was watching with wide eyes. The admiration and respect in each of their expressions had Harry's face heating up with a slight flush. He hadn't meant to show off, he was just letting loose with Theo!

"Yes, Professor." Theo replied, though he scowled slightly. He tucked his wand back into his robes smoothly. Harry pocketed his own wand and turned, offering a hand to Hermione. She winced, rubbing her hip that'd hit the floor hard when she fell, but accepted his hand. Draco was just wiping dust from his robe with a sigh of defeat.

"Class is dismissed for today." Snape announced, eyes still trained on Harry. "And Potter? You stay behind."

“Yes sir.” Harry said, but rolled his eyes for Hermione and Draco to see. Slowly the other students filtered out of the room, collecting their things and casting Harry backwards, sympathetic looks as they disappeared into the hallway.

“Mister Nott, you’re excused.” Theo hadn’t moved, standing firmly beside Harry with a perfectly neutral expression. “I wish to speak to Potter alone.”

“With all due respect, Professor, he’s just going to tell me the moment you dismiss him.” Theo said evenly. “It would save time to simply address us together.”

“It’s true, Professor.” Harry smiled. “Theo and I have no secrets.” Snape sneered at them.

“That is unwise.” Snape snapped. “There is a necessity to keep some things under wraps, creating a zero percent chance of betrayal or exposure.”

“Watch it.” Theo’s eyes flashed silver as he spoke scathingly, “I would sooner drown myself in my own blood and cut myself into pieces than betray Harry Potter. Can you say the same, *Professor?*”

“Theo.” Harry admonished quietly. He took Theo’s hand and squeezed it tightly. “Enough.” Theo said nothing, but he met Snape’s heated fury with a cold glare sharp as daggers. “Professor, what is it you have to tell me?” Snape said nothing. Harry snapped in irritation, “Snape, I don’t have time for this. You tell me *right now*.” Snape stiffened considerably.

“Very well." Snape said, face twisted with unease. Even angry with Harry, Snape knew better than to challenge Harry. “Regardless of your stupidity, Mister Potter, I would strongly advise you to avoid discussing anything to do with your extracurriculars or summer experience. Our previous Headmaster will be contacting you sometime today with a note, an invitation to meet. He plans on beginning private lessons with you that will continue for the duration of the school year.”

“What?” Harry’s eyes widened. “Why? About what?”

“It would be unwise of me to tell you.” Snape sneered. “If he suspects I told you anything at all he would become suspicious.”

“How did you find this out?” Theo asked, mouth set grimly.

“He visited me just before school began. He requested to use my Office as a secret meeting location for your lessons.” Snape glared, clearly disdainful. “I had no choice but to accept. There was nothing I could do. Minerva had already rejected him, forbidding him from using her Office, the Headmaster’s Office. He would not have taken lightly to being dismissed by me after that.”

“I understand.” Harry said with a nod. “I need you to contact our mutual friend and let him know what’s going on, and do it *quickly*. If our previous Headmaster plans to teach me privately, it’s possible he’ll be keeping a very close eye on me in future. We can’t risk the safety of our mutual friend’s plans.”

“Very well.” Snape looked distinctly unhappy taking Harry’s request, but Harry knew he’d follow through. “Now get out of my sight.”

“With pleasure.” Harry turned on his heel, pulling Theo by the hand as he left the room. Theo seemed inclined to stay, probably to grill Snape for more information, but that wouldn’t do them any good. Theo seemed to realize this and thankfully didn’t fight Harry’s hold on him.

Predictably, when Harry stepped into the hall he was immediately surrounded. Ron, Hermione, Draco, Neville, and Malcolm had all stayed behind to ask what the hell Snape wanted. Calming them with reassurance, Harry relayed the information with Theo adding angry comments about Snape’s blatant disrespect for Harry, and daring to challenge Theo’s loyalty.

“What could he want?” Ron asked after Harry finished explaining.

“Maybe to discuss the Horcruxes?” Draco suggested, frowning. “If he believes the Dark Lord is still a threat, despite there being no evidence of such a thing because of our mutual friend, then he might want your help in locating them.”

“Good fucking luck with that.” Ron muttered.

“I guess we’ll just have to wait and see.” Harry sighed, running a hand through his tousled hair. “We’re going to have to be extremely careful. We were lucky he wasn’t watching me so closely last year, but it seems that luck’s run out.”

“D’you think it’s safe to hold meetings?” Malcolm asked then, “If he’s watching, it might be too dangerous.”

“If it’s that serious, we’ll have to.” Theo said. “But if it comes down to it, we may have to go forward without Harry in attendance.” That silenced them all, grimness settling in their chests. This wasn’t a good start to their year.

It wasn’t even five minutes later that fourth year Jack Sloper stopped them in the hallway with a very nervous expression. “Uh, Mister Harry?” He cleared his throat, looking between Harry and the rolled up parchment. “It’s from Professor Dumbledore.”

“Thank you, Sloper.” Harry offered Sloper a comforting smile. “I’ve been expecting this.”

“Oh.” Some of the tension in Sloper’s shoulders relaxed. “That’s good.”

“Excuse us.” Harry said, ducking his head. “Thank you for delivering this.”

“Oh, no problem Mister Harry!” The boy grinned, running off with a backwards wave to their group.

Harry looked down at the parchment, took a deep breath, then unrolled it.

> *Dear Harry,*
> *I know we have not spoken in some time, so I’d be delighted if you’d join me in the Potion Master’s Office this Saturday. Please arrive at 8pm. And don’t worry, I will ensure Professor Snape is away for the duration of our time together. I hope you are enjoying your first day back at school for another year of learning.*
> *Yours sincerely,*
> ***Albus Dumbledore***

“Snape must’ve kept his Office the same, instead of giving it up to Professor Slughorn.” Theo muttered as Harry showed off the letter. “If Snape’s Office is still in the Potion Master’s area. I wonder where Professor Slughorn’s Office is…” Theo looked up at the others and sighed. “Not that that’s particularly important right now, but still.”

“This is bad.” Hermione said, biting her lip. “Why in the world would he feel the need to meet you like this?”

“We shouldn't freak out right now.” Neville told her a bit nervously. “Not until we know what it’s about. Right?" Hermione nodded reluctantly. "But Harry?” Draco addressed Harry with a serious expression and worry in his eyes. “Keep your wand on you. We can’t

have another incident like with Umbridge.”

“Right.” Harry nodded. When he was dragged to Umbridge’s Office the night of the Astronomy Exam, he hadn’t been fast enough to draw his wand - Umbridge knocked him unconscious with a stunner before he knew what hit him. “I’ll do my best.”

Chapter End Notes

Oop— Dumbledore's getting involved 👀👀

What did we think?? This isn't BETA read so please point our errors if you see them! ♡♡♡

Harry's First Potions Class

Chapter Summary

Harry attends Potions and acquires some Luck.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone!! Happy Tuesday, and we've got a chapter today! This one's silly and fun, which I hope you guys enjoy ♡♡

(if you see any mistakes, please lemme know!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Four

The Draught of Accidents and Luck

Potions snuck up on Harry, despite the fact that he'd been expecting it. He spent the free period and lunch studying with Ron for Snape's Defense classes. Their assigned textbook covered tips and tricks on channeling spells and magic wordlessly through their wands; Ron said Harry's guidance in his private lessons the previous year were much better.

So when double Potions did come around, Harry met his classmates outside the classroom that was managed by Snape for too many years.

Harry was a little surprised there weren't very many of them in the Potions N.E.W.T. level class, only three Gryffindors, four Slytherins, four Ravenclaws, and one lone Hufflepuff. But he probably shouldn't've been that surprised considering most people hated Potions because of Snape's teaching methods. People probably thought continuing to earn their N.E.W.T. in Potions wasn't worth it, which, honestly, Harry couldn't fault them on that.

“Why isn't Daphne here?” Harry asked. Only Draco, Theo, Blaise, and Pansy were there waiting. “She scored high.”

“Daph wants to study Creatures.” Draco shrugged. “She said Potions wasn't a priority for her.”

“I don't see it.” Theo said, shaking his head. “Potions is an extremely versatile subject and earning a N.E.W.T. offers a leg up no matter what you aim to study.”

“Well Daph disagrees.” Terry Boot said, grinning. “Though, Chael sorta agreed with her. He almost dropped.”

“*But* I didn't.” Michael Corner slung an arm around Harry wearing a grin matching Terry's. “I decided to stick it out in the pursuit of knowledge.”

“Bullshit.” Ron coughed. “You're just doing it because Terry is.” Michael shrugged, not admitting anything. Terry smiled.

“I didn't know you were pursuing Potions, actually.” Pansy said, turning to Harry. “I know you scored well enough, but I didn't think it was your thing.”

“It's not.” Harry admitted. “But my new friend suggested I should go for it.” Damn Tom for making sense when he made points.

“Oh.” Blaise raised his eyebrows. “Why?”

“Because he thinks it'd be a leg up no matter what I studied.” Harry said, eyeing Theo's smug smile. “Apparently if I wanted to go into a field in Defense, even teaching, having a Potions N.E.W.T. would give me an advantage.”

“Told you.” Theo muttered. Harry elbowed him.

“I'm just here because Harry is.” Ron admitted with a grin. “I got the score, might as well stick it out.”

“Hey, we're happy to have you.” Pansy laughed. "We're apparently running short of Gryffindors."

“Looks like you'll have to make due with three.” Harry grinned. “You've got a three set Gryffindor package, take it or leave it.”

“We're all set, then.” Terry patted Harry's shoulders brightly.

Slughorn then swept the door open and smiled joyfully at them all, ushering them in with surprising excitement. He seemed particularly happy to see Blaise, Harry, and Theo. They ignored his shining smile and headed inside with the crowd.

Inside the classroom Slughorn had set out three tables each with four

seats, perfect for their class of a dozen even. Harry ended up sitting with Theo, Hermione, and Draco. It was slightly funny that Harry ended up at what some might call the ‘smart kid table’.

Around the room were three cauldrons, each filled with a different potion, each unique and attention grabbing. The one nearest to the table Harry ended up in was clear, like innocently simmering water. Though Harry doubted it was actually plain water.

“Alright!” Slughorn swept to the front of the room, clapping his hands together with a wide smile. “Scales and potion kits out everyone! And don't forget those textbooks of yours, copies of *Advanced Potion-Making.*” Harry, among others, plopped his brand new copy of the textbook into the table. Slughorn briefly paused to count twelve copies of *Advanced Potion-Making* sitting out and ready to be used.

"Perfect." Slughorn continued, satisfied. "Now, I've prepared a few potions for you to have a look at, a sort of introduction of the curriculum to be studied throughout the year. These potions are the kind of thing you should be able to make with ease after completing your N.E.W.T. classes. You all ought to have heard of them by now, even if you haven't made them. Can anyone tell me what this one is?"

Everyone leaned over to see the cauldron sitting directly next to Draco, the water-looking one. Hermione's hand shot up into the air immediately. Slughorn pointed to her.

"It's Veritaserum." Hermione answered easily. "A colorless, odorless potion that forces the drinker to tell the truth." Ah, yes. Snape threatened to put some of that in Harry's pumpkin juice once.

"Very good, very good!" Slughorn praised. He moved towards the table with Ernie MacMillan, Oliver Rivers, Malcolm Preece, and Blaise. Their display cauldron was deep and bubbling, mud popping in squishy motions. It was easily identifiable.

"Now, this one here is pretty well known.” Slughorn said conversationally, “It's featured in a few Ministry leaflets lately too, so who can–?" Hermione's hand was up before Slughorn was even finished speaking, nearly whacking Draco in the ear. Theo, seeing this, leaned away from her.

“Polyjuice.” Hermione said immediately. “It's Polyjuice Potion, sir.” Harry ducked his head to hide a grin, remembering what happened the last time they were this close to Polyjuice. Draco kicked him under the table, no doubt remembering the story Harry dramatically

recounted for everyone the minute Hermione wasn't lurking around to stop him.

“Correct! Excellent, excellent work.” Slughorn looked delighted at Hermione's easy answer. “And this one?” He gestured to the last cauldron, closest to the far table with Ron, Pansy, Terry, and Michael.

“Amortentia.” Pride shone in Hermione's face. She'd never been called on I'm Potions before; the excitement shook her entire body as Slughorn beamed at her.

“And I presume you know what it does?”

“It's the most powerful love-potion known to man.” Hermione told him eagerly. “It's recognizable by the mother-of-pearl sheen on the surface, and the steam forming into tight spirals. It's supposed to smell differently for everyone, mimicking what attracts us most.”

“Very good! Very good, Miss, uh?” Slughorn gestured to her.

“Hermione Granger.”

“Oh! Any chance you'd be related to Hector Dagworth-Granger?” Slughorn tilted his head with interest. Similar to the sticky interest he expressed when he took Harry, Theo, and Blaise aside on the train. “Founder of the Most Extraordinary Society of Potioneers?"

“No, I don't think so, sir.” Hermione said, her excitement dimming slightly. “I'm a Muggleborn.”

“Well, either way, twenty points to Gryffindor for your exceptional answers, Miss Granger.” Slughorn offered her a solid nod before turning to the rest of the class. “Now, it's important to note that Amortentia cannot create genuine, honest love; something like that is impossible to manufacture or create out of ingredients and clever stirs. No, Amortentia causes an irresistible infatuation or avid obsession. It is quite possibly the most dangerous potion known to wizardkind, as of now.” He looked around the room sternly to properly gauge their understanding of his wanting. “You may not think it so, but believe me, I have seen over the years the real damage obsessive love can cause.”

“Now!” Slughorn clapped his hands and moved on, despite the unnerved looks the students were exchanging with each other. “It is time for us to get to work.”

“Uh, sir?” Ernie raised his hand awkwardly. “You haven't told us about *that* one.” He gestured to the black cauldron on Slughorn's desk, square and flat black.

The potion was so gold it radiated brightly from within, swishing around in the cauldron despite not simmering or boiling in any noticeable fashion. Little goldfish made of molten gold droplets danced along the surface, never spilling even as it sloshed over the sides as it danced in place. It was beautiful and mesmerizing.

“Ah, yes.” Slughorn turned to it rather dramatically, as though it was his plan all along to ‘forget’ until someone pointed it out. Theo specifically looked unimpressed by the obvious tactic. “Well, you see, *that* one happens to be the most curious potion I've ever had the pleasure of brewing and sampling. I presume you can enlighten us as to its name, Miss Granger?”

“Felix Felicis.” Hermione answered without missing a beat. “Also known as Liquid Luck. It makes you extremely lucky.”

“Correct! Ten more points to Gryffindor.” Slughorn chuckled at Hermione's enthusiasm. “Yes, it's a funny little potion, Felix Felicis. Desperately tricky to make, disastrous if done wrong, and wholly worth it. With a single dose, such as this one, you will find all your endeavors will succeed… until the potions effects wear off.”

“Why don't people take it all the time?” Terry asked. “If it's so great.”

“Because if taken too often, there will be nasty side effects.” Slughorn warned. “Excessive giddiness, recklessness, dangerous arrogance or overconfidence - highly toxic in the case of an overdose, as well.” Terry looked rather green at that.

“Have you ever taken it, sir?” Michael piped up.

“Twice, in my lifetime.” Slughorn smiled, a bit dreamily. “The first time I was twenty-four, the second when I was fifty-seven. Two tablespoons with my breakfast, resulting in two perfect days.” He sighed, clearly reminiscing, then shook his nostalgic expression. “And that, my dear students, will be the prize offered after this class lesson.”

Slughorn drew a tiny glass bottle, barely bigger than a vial, housing shining gold liquid, held shut by a thin cork, from his pocket to show off to the room. “Twelve hours worth of Liquid Luck - from dawn to dusk one of you shall have the luckiest day of your life. Though, a

word of warning, Felix Felicis is a banned substance from all organized competitions and events. So this luck must be used on an ordinary day, meant to make the ordinary become extraordinary! But how do we intend to win this little Felix, eh? That's what you all must be asking yourselves!"

"To do that, we must turn to page ten in our textbooks, *Advanced Potion-Making*!" Slughorn tucked the vial away once more, the entire class' eyes following it disappear. "Today we will be using the last hour or so left in this class to attempt brewing the Draught of Living Death. It's quite possibly the most difficult potion you've ever been asked to brew, but I am not expecting perfection by any means!" Slughorn laughed. "But the student who does the best, and comes the closest to finishing, wins the prize! Now! Let's get brewing, shall we?"

As it would turn out, Slughorn wasn't kidding - the Draught of Living Death was definitely the hardest potion they'd ever been asked to brew. Even Hermione and Theo were struggling to change the color of their respective potions.

Harry ended up following the lead of his tablemates. It did stump him when the three of them started doing things slightly differently each, despite reading the exact same instructions from the textbook.

"Why is yours purple?" Draco demanded, eyeing the royal color of Hermione's potion. "Hermione, we've got the same bloody instructions, how is it yours looks like that? Have you got it wrong?"

"No, it's exactly right because I added the powdered root of asphodel earlier than last fucking week, *Draco.*" Hermione snapped, sarcasm sharp. "You added yours too late."

"Did not." Draco argued. "It said to add as it boils."

"Yes, *as* it boils." Hermione said impatiently. "You added it way after it boiled."

"That's because *'as it boils'* means as it's already boiling and ready."

"You're born wrong." Theo clicked his tongue, eyes not leaving his own potion. "It clearly means to add it just before it begins to boil, on the tipping point between a simmer and a boil. Hence, *'as it boils'*."

Harry himself was just trying to keep up with them as best he could. His potion vaguely resembled theirs, but he was mixing and matching their different understandings of the book and didn't have the highest

hopes for his work.

Blue fumes slowly filled the air, hit and sticky and humid. Hermione's already frizzy curls tightened, poofing out even more like a mane. Draco's perfectly styled hair was ruffled, and Harry imagined his own hair was even messier than usual. Pansy sure was a picture across the room, her edgy black haircut disheveled and curling slightly at the ends. Everyone was clearly worse for wear as time went on.

“Terry looks distraught.” Harry noted just past the halfway point. “I reckon his potion isn't going so well.”

“Yeah, well, neither are ours.” Draco said, very carefully cutting his sopophorous beans.

“Speak for yourself.” Theo's voice was perfectly calm and collected, as though he were out for a stroll, but his cheeks were flushed and his knuckles were a bright, angry red. Seeing him so frazzled almost made Harry laugh.

Unfortunately his almost-laugh was interrupted because a sopophorous bean flew straight at him. He flinched as it slammed into his face.

“Ouch!” Harry rubbed his nose, a stinging spot forming where the projectile had flown at him. He leaned a hand down on the table to look a bit accusingly at Michael at the nearby table, looking rather guilty.

“Sorry!” Michael called, wincing. “These buggers are hard to cut. It jumped away from me.”

“No worries.” Harry waved him off. Unfortunately the hand he placed on the table came up slick, apparently having squashed a bunch of his sopophorous beans. Harry cursed under his breath. The juice was *everywhere* - Harry had no idea how the little shriveled beans had so much juice in them!

“What?” Hermione leaned over, peeking at his cauldron as he swore.

“Nothing.” Harry muttered resignedly. They'd all already chopped up their beans and added the juices, so Harry had no other option than to work with what he had. Luckily the smashed beans squeezed out more than enough juice for him to add to his potion.

“What the–” Draco did a double take at Harry's potion as it lightened

immediately, reaching a pale shade of lilac. Draco's was nowhere near that color.

“How did you do that?” Hermione demanded, torn between stirring her potion and staring at Harry's.

“I just added the juice.” Harry sighed. “Fuck. I probably added too much.” If his potion was way lighter than all three of their potions were, Harry had definitely done something wrong.

“Too *much*?” Theo echoed with a blink. “How?”

“There was just so much.” Harry explained awkwardly, “I got it everywhere, honestly. It's a mess.” He hurriedly started stirring it, woefully glancing at his juice soaked textbook. “Which way are we supposed to stir? Clockwise again?”

“No! Counterclockwise.” Hermione answered immediately. Harry nodded.

Stirring counterclockwise, Harry glanced around the room. Ron was cursing himself in circles, angrily stirring a cauldron of tar black that probably should've been purple by now; Pansy beside him looked anxious but determined, muttering to Ron and seemingly pointing out steps in the textbook.

“Careful.” Draco caught Harry's attention. He was eyeing Hermione, who was looking more and more anxious that her potion wasn't changing color no matter what she did. “You'll ruin it if you fuss too much.”

“Where did I go wrong?” Hermione lamented, frustration coloring her tone and face. “Why's it not changing color?” Harry wondered what the right color was, if not Hermione's plum purple colored potion.

“Harry, that's the wrong way.” Theo nudged him. Harry blinked.

“Shit.” As Harry's eyes drifted, apparently he'd started stirring it clockwise instead. Harry hurriedly corrected, again stirring counterclockwise.

“And, that's it! Time's up!” Slughorn announced, smiling out at them. The blue smog in the air was so thick it was a bit hard to see the front of the classroom. “Stirring spoons down, everybody, step back from your work. Now, I ought to come around and check your potions, eh?”

“Fucking hell.” Hermione crossed her arms, glaring at her cauldron.

“Whoever invented this potion sucks.” Draco muttered, eyeing his potion. It was nearly the same color as Hermione's.

“Harry, yours is so light.” Theo completely ignored his own potion, sitting at a pretty shade of lavender, in favor of examining Harry's.

“And pink.” Harry said, resigned. His bubbling potion resembled the color of pink rose petals.

“That's what it's–” Theo broke off as Slughorn made his way over to their table.

“Hmph.” He nodded at Hermione's and Draco's, approval in his eyes. Slughorn smiled a little at Theo's, then paused with a little gasp as he moved to Harry's. “Ah! A clear winner!”

“What.” Harry blinked.

“Excellent work, just excellent.” Slughorn laughed, jolly and bright. “Just a bit paler of a pink and it would be perfect! And I'm sure with more time you'd manage it, no doubt! My my, it's clear you inherited your mother's talent. She was a marvel at Potions, and it's wonderful to see her legacy and talent residing in you.” With a beaming smile Slughorn offered the tiny glass bottle of shimmering gold liquid to Harry. “As promised, twelve hours of Liquid Luck for the winner! Use it well.”

“Um, yes sir.” Harry nodded slowly, accepting the glass vial delicately. He looked at his friends with a confused shrug, then slipped it into his robes.

“That's all the time we have today!” Slughorn clapped his hands together. “Everyone, pack up your things. Vanish the contents of your cauldrons please, if you can. If you cannot, ask a neighbor! Then, off to supper for us all.”

“How did you do that?” Hermione demanded soon after, once they were packed and leaving.

“I dunno.” Harry shrugged. “I messed up and it turned out okay?”

“It must've been the beans.” Theo muttered, eyes sharp as he was clearly deep in thought. “You said you added too much juice?”

“Yeah, I got it all over me.” Harry lamented. Theo looked him up and down, slowly, then nodded. With a muttered cast Theo righted Harry's robes back to clean and dry. “Thanks.” Harry grinned.

“Maybe it requires more juice than it says.” Theo hummed. “Or maybe we simply didn't add enough due to the difficulties in cutting through the beans for their juices.”

“That's possible.” Draco spoke up, “I honestly just added what I could get from my beans, I didn't measure it that well.”

“I measured mine perfectly, and it still wasn't right.” Hermione said with a heavy frown. “Maybe you're right, maybe you need to add half the correct measurement to the recipe to make it right.” Hermione blew out a frustrated breath. “But then why wouldn't it be in the textbook already?”

“No clue, but Harry's clearly onto something.” Draco grinned. “You're a natural at messing up and still winning. Just like your first Quidditch match.”

“I nearly swallowed the Snitch.” Harry laughed. “I remember.”

“Harry, *damn*, how did you do that?” Ron and the rest of their classmates joined them where they'd stopped in the hall. Ron slung an arm around Harry's shoulder with a grin. “You never win at Potions!”

“He scored an Exceeds Expectations.” Draco raised an eyebrow.

“You know what I mean.” Ron waved him off. “But seriously, what'd you do?”

“Can you *believe* he doesn't even know?”

For the rest of the day all they could talk about was Harry's miraculous talent at making specifically the Draught of Living Death. They found it absolutely hilarious that he'd succeeded purely by accident, some more than others. Hermione was miffed the proper instructions were failing her, but Harry wasn't too worried about it - she was never the best loser, especially when the ‘winner’ wasn't actually better. But, as always, she'd get over it.

“Only the first day, and you've already got the school in an uproar.” Draco huffed. “That is so *Harry*.”

“I hate that you're right.” Harry laughed. “Don't worry, I'll definitely

and inevitably end up doing it again." Because if there was anything he was good at, it was causing an uproar.

Chapter End Notes

Questions you don't need to ask because I've got the **answers** for you right **here**!

1. *Will the textbook belonging to The Half-Blood Prince make an appearance in this work?* No, it will not. Unfortunately I've removed that aspect because this Harry is just too well prepared to forget something like a textbook. Sorry!

2. *Was this chapter and Harry's miraculous mixup just a cover-up so Harry ends up with the Liquid Luck?* Yes, yes it was :) When I removed The Half-blood Prince textbook, I needed a way for Harry to still get the Felix Felicis. And here is what I came up with!

Thank you for reading, and I hope you look forward to the next one ;)

Owl News

Chapter Summary

> Harry gets two newspapers, one with good news and one with more... *complicated* news. Then he attends Transfiguration.

Chapter Notes

> Hello everyone! Happy Tuesday, we've got a chapter today!! This one's a little word-heavy, but sometimes that's necessary.
>
> I hope you enjoy ♡♡♡

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Five

The Innocent and The Guilty

“We’ve got Transfiguration, Charms, and Herbology.” Ron said, glancing at their schedule. “But they’re so spread out, we’ve got a lot of free time today.”

“Except we’ll be spending a lot of it studying, I’d imagine.” Harry pointed out. “Transfiguration hasn’t been our best subject, if you recall, and you know as well as I that McGonagall isn’t pulling any punches when it comes to the difficulty of our upcoming lessons.” Ron sighed heavily.

“You’re probably right.” Ron said. “Bloody hell.” Harry laughed.

“Well I’ve got Arithmancy today as well.” Hermione said, reorganizing the books in her bag as they made their way down to breakfast. “Just before lunch. Ugh, I bet there’ll be even more homework dumped on me after that.”

“Yikes.” Harry grinned. “Sucks to be the smartest, I guess.”

“The smartest, eh?” Hermione said, grinning back at him. “I’m telling Theo you said that.”

“Wait, no.” Harry sputtered, “I take it back–”

“Too late!” Hermione called, skipping ahead of him. “I’m gonna teeellll him!”

“I said I take it back! Wait! You’re both the smartest! Oh bollocks–”

Ron’s laughter followed them as Harry ran after Hermione down the marble steps. Harry grinned as he caught her, wrapping his arms around her waist, picking her feet off the floor and spinning her around. Hermione shrieked, giggling as they stumbled into the Great Hall. Hermione dropped her bag, books spilling across the floor.

“Okay! Okay! You win.” Hermione exclaimed, laughter spilling out like her parchment rolls running away on the slick stone. “Theo will never know you think I’m the smartest.”

“You’re *both* the smartest.” Harry huffed, but he dutifully set her back down and bent to help her retrieve all her parchments and assorted textbooks. “You’re a pain in the ass.”

“Thank you, I strive to be.” Hermione offered a mock bow. Harry stuck his tongue out at her.

“Okay kids, let’s have some breakfast.” Ron joined them, strolling leisurely into the Hall wearing a sideways grin. “I’m starving.”

The trio plopped down for breakfast with their friends, easily slipping into conversation with the surrounding Gryffindors as food appeared and owls slowly swooped in to deliver the morning mail. As usual, Hermione’s monthly subscription to the Daily Prophet sent an owl to drop off the newest edition. Hermione accepted it with a little nod to the owl.

Harry was just digging into a pile of eggs and strawberries when Hermione gasped, grabbing his attention. Harry looked up to find she was beaming at the pages. She looked up at him as he opened his mouth to ask what she was so excited about.

“Harry! Look.” Hermione's eyes were bright as she hurriedly shoved the *Daily Prophet* into his hands. Harry fumbled with his fork, throwing her an unimpressed look, but dutifully straightened the flimsy pages to examine it. His eyes then widened in disbelief, a wide smile breaking out across his face.

Sirius Black Ruled Innocent!

This past evening Sirius Black was put on trial for the murder of Peter

*Pettigrew and a dozen muggles, standing accused of the event on October 31st of 1981, and was deemed **innocent**. It came to light that Sirius Black was never given a trial upon his arrest, an occurrence that stirred unrest and anger in many who recently learned the truth.*

At the height of the war when You-Know-Who was defeated by Harry Potter, trials were put on hold to ensure no suspected Death Eaters were ruled wrongly innocent and released back into the masses. For some, it would seem this restricted their right to justice. It seems while some were kept safe by such a decision, others were condemned by it.

Sirius Black, 21 at the time of the event, was arrested after being found laughing and crying hysterically at the scene surrounded by dead muggles and the single pinky finger of Peter Pettigrew, Black's supposed close friend. It seemed to Aurors on sight that Black was the only possible suspect and executed an immediate arrest. Black was kept in isolation for one week in the Ministry, then sent to Azkaban Prison for life. Or so we thought.

Harry skimmed the article in disbelief, skipping to another page to find even more news on the subject. It seemed everyone had something to say on the topic.

Peter Pettigrew Found Alive?!

Peter Pettigrew, a close friend to both James Potter and Sirius Black, was found alive by Aurors and taken into custody this past summer. This shocking turn of events revealed now put Sirius Black's guilty ruling in question.

Black was accused of Pettigrew's murder on October 31st of 1981, the day of You-Know-Who's defeat, but with Pettigrew found and in custody it seems Black was innocent and falsely imprisoned. Upon further investigation, it was revealed indisputably that Black was framed by Pettigrew for both Pettigrew's supposed death and the death of all twelve muggles who died in the consequential explosion. Sirius Black is innocent of all accused crimes.

Sirius Black, after years on the run after his infamous escape from Azkaban, finally turned himself in yesterday morning to attend his well earned trial. Though many argued his successful escape from Azkaban warranted him more time spent in prison, a majority raised the concern that he'd simply escape once again. After a hard vote Black was ruled innocent of all crimes, pardoned from all his alleged wrongdoings, and released a free man.

So where is Black now? Black was sent to St. Mungo's for a mandatory wellness check for both his physical and mental condition where he'll be kept for observation for a one week duration. After that Black will be reinstated as a fully free citizen with a clean record, as his felony and criminal status have been wiped from his legal history.

Harry could hardly believe it as he quickly scanned the many pages covering Sirius' case. Sirius was *free*. And he was receiving care for his mental and physical health!! That was more than Harry could've hoped for.

"About damn time." Ron said, peeking over Harry's shoulder. "We've been trying to tell them for *years.*"

"What's Black going to do now?" Dean asked, peaking over. He couldn't lean very far though because Seamus, sitting next to him, had absently thrown his legs over Dean's lap and sorta trapped him in place. "After he's let out of St Mungo's, I mean."

"Well, I'd have to ask him." Harry said, tilting his head. "I remember he mentioned having an apartment before he went to Azkaban."

"Why didn't he go there after he escaped?" Hermione asked. "We all know he hates it at G—" She choked, then cleared her throat. "At the place Dumbledore has him these days." Politely, nobody commented on her inability to voice the location. They were all well aware the building was placed under a Fidelius Charm.

"It was probably being watched." Neville hummed. "If I were an Auror, I'd probably assume an escapee would go straight home after breaking out of prison. They were probably staking out the place as soon as they realized he'd escaped."

"That makes sense." Ron agreed with a nod.

"I wonder if Remus is with him." Hermione tilted her head thoughtfully. "I reckon someone's got to be with him while he's recovering and adjusting to being pardoned."

"I'd bet on it." Harry said. "Remus wouldn't leave his side, I guarantee it." They all paused as Malcolm strode over from the Ravenclaw table, catching eyes as he switched tables.

"Harry, did you see the article in today's paper?" Malcolm asked, voice low.

“About Sirius?” Harry asked, holding up Hermione’s copy of the *Daily Prophet*. “It's brilliant, I know.”

“No, not the *Prophet.*” Malcolm shook his head. “But congrats to your godfather. Anyway, look, in the *Wizard's Voice*. The article was published this morning, and it's about Dumbledore.”

“What? Dumbledore?” Neville blinked, straightening. “What about?”

“It's about the warrant for his arrest.” Malcolm said, offering Harry the paper. “Turns out, they're still looking for him.”

Harry frowned. He was meeting Dumbledore the following day, and Harry was already planning to bring up the topic of Dumbledore's status with the law and how in the world he'd wormed his way out of the charges this time. Well… it seemed Dumbledore hadn't been able to after all.

Headmaster Dumbledore Still At Large?

Though not many updates have been found regarding previous Headmaster of Hogwarts Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore and his supposed plot to overthrow the Ministry, it is a controversial topic that needs to be further addressed.

First of all, what did Headmaster Dumbledore do to warrant such hostility towards his image? According to anonymous sources, Dumbledore plotted to create an army using innocent and woefully misled Hogwarts students to overpower the Ministry and take over as Britain's new Minister for Magic. Though Headmaster Dumbledore has publicly refused the position when previously offered, he keeps a close eye on Minister for Magic Cornelius Fudge and offers unsolicited ‘advice’ or ‘counsel’ whenever Headmaster Dumbledore deems his expertise ‘necessary.’

Some say Headmaster Dumbledore is being framed in retaliation for his delusional claims of You-Know-Who’s supposed return following the tragic death of Cedric Diggory, the result of a terrible accident during the Third Task of the 1994 Triwizard Tournament. Headmaster Dumbledore went so far as to suggest Harry Potter, our dear Boy-Who-Lived, was somehow involved in You-Know-Who’s alleged return - a heinous accusation that has since been disregarded by the public after over a year of nothing but undisturbed peace across Britain.

Headmaster Dumbledore's whereabouts are thus far unknown, as are

his plans for the Ministry and any future coup attempts. Be vigilant and on the lookout so our hardworking Aurors can bring Headmaster Dumbledore to justice and properly face his crimes against the Ministry.

Harry didn't know what to think as he read. While it was great everyone had it out for Dumbledore, it wouldn't end well if Aurors tried to apprehend him. Last time they tried, back when Umbridge caught on to their DA scheme, Dumbledore blew up his office and collapsed the ceiling on top of everyone, including Harry! That wasn't a good track record for Dumbledore.

“I thought he'd've gotten himself out of trouble by now.” Neville muttered. “Not that I’m unhappy they’ve got it out for him, but it’s odd he hasn’t sorted this out by now, isn’t it?”

“I’m with Neville.” Seamus said, frowning. “This is weird. I feel like Dumbledore’s playing at something.”

“I just have one main concern.” Malcolm said seriously. He kept his voice low, leaning closer to Harry. “How the hell is he planning to offer you private lessons, and inside the castle no less, without being seen or turned in?”

“Shit, you've got a point.” Ron said. “I hadn't thought about that.”

“He has to think nobody here would turn on him, still loyal to their previous Headmaster.” Hermione said with a little frown. “That or he's completely confident nobody will see him aside from Harry.”

“Probably the latter.” Neville said. “He prefers the sneaky side of things.”

“You're right about that.” Ron nodded.

“I'll talk to him.” Harry said finally. “I doubt he'll actually give me an answer, but I'd better bring it up with him anyway. If I just ignore it, it could make him suspicious.”

“I don't like this.” Hermione bit her lip. “I don't like the idea of you spending hours alone with him.”

“I'll be fine.” Harry took her hand with a smile, squeezing gently. “Don't worry. I'll have it handled.” As Hermione squeezed back and offered a wobbly smile, Harry really hoped that was true.

“Well, you’d better not get caught.” Malcolm sighed. “The Ministry is definitely still wary of you, even if they’ve chilled out after the whole mess last year. If you’re seen with Dumbledore… I don’t want anything happening to you. Not after the lengths we’ve gone through to protect you.”

“I don’t think he wants the Ministry to get me either.” Harry assured him, even as the responsibility and weight of the situation settled across his shoulders. “But I’ll be careful. Promise.”

“It’s not your word I doubt.” Malcolm said quietly, He offered a nervous little smile before retreating back to Ravenclaw, leaving the paper behind. Malcolm was immediately surrounded by hushed whispers, Terry and Michael and Padma leaning in to whisper questions Malcolm seemed almost reluctant to answer.

It wasn’t like Harry was keeping the private lessons with Dumbledore a secret, but he hadn’t exactly told anyone outside of who’d read the note with him when it was delivered. Harry would have to make a statement about it eventually, but he didn’t want to cause a panic by telling everyone before Harry even knew what Dumbledore wanted. Besides, one week of waiting wasn’t the end of the world.

Or, that’s what Harry was telling himself.

.

Harry tried not to think about it, but they were collectively subdued as they headed to Transfiguration after breakfast. They tried for cheer, joking around a little, but it wasn’t as genuine or upbeat as it had been. They were all worried, and Harry couldn’t do anything about it until he had more information for them.

“Any idea what McGonagall will be teaching?” Harry asked as they stood outside the classroom.

“Probably higher levels of Transfiguration.” Hermione hummed a little. “Like Human Transfiguration. She mentioned last year that it was a N.E.W.T. level subject, so there’s a strong chance we’ll be learning it this year.”

“How would we even learn that?” Ron blinked. “Not on ourselves,

right?"

"I'd guess on ourselves, yeah." Hermione offered him an angelic smile. "Don't worry, if you turn your ears blue I'll fix that right up for you. After a good laugh, of course."

"Shove off." Ron huffed, hiding a grin.

They all straightened to attention as McGonagall opened her door, beckoning them all in. There were slightly over a dozen of them, a handful from each House, and they all found an individual desk to occupy as they filtered in. Harry found every desk had a delicate purple pillow sitting dainty dead center, probably about to be Transfigured into something.

McGongall took no time heading to the front of the room and standing firmly before them. Once she had their undivided attention, she addressed them calmly.

"This is the beginning of your N.E.W.T. level education." McGonagall announced, her clear voice echoing through the room. "My N.E.W.T. level Transfiguration class is only open to students who achieved an EE or higher on their O.W.L. examinations, and as such the curriculum will reflect that strict difficulty level. Do not expect to breeze through this class, as even my most talented over the years have struggled through the N.E.W.T. material. But do not be discouraged. I will remain a resource to all my students during lessons. If you are struggling, take the initiative to approach me and ask for guidance. I may be the Headmistress, but I am first and foremost an educator and Head of House. Do keep that in mind."

"Now. As I'm sure Professor Snape made perfectly clear, nonverbal casting offers innumerable benefits, and not only in Defense and Transfiguration. You'll be practicing some nonverbal magic in Charms with Professor Flitwick as well." McGonagall pulled out her wand and casually held it in hand. "To start off the year we'll be practicing spells that you've already learned and become proficient in. For example." McGonagall faced her desk, swished her wand, and without a word the purple pillow on her large oak desk, identical to each pillow adorning the student desks, promptly Vanished. Then she turned back to the class. "You all will demonstrate your understanding by mimicking the spell I used. Recognize the spell, and cast it on your own pillows wordlessly. Wands out, you may begin."

Harry pulled out his wand and examined the pillow. Obviously

McGonagall had used the Vanishing Charm, *Evanesco.* He glanced up at her nervously and wondered vaguely if she knew he could already cast it nonverbally. Harry used *Evanesco* both wandless and wordless during Wraith meetings when he needed to get the chairs out of their way quickly, so he had plenty of practice over the previous year. Because nonverbal spells hadn't come up in classes before, Harry hadn't broadcasted the ability.

With a deep breath, Harry swished his wand and Vanished the pillow with a single thought. It disappeared cleanly in an instant with a small 'pop' as the space it once occupied emptied suddenly.

"Very good, Mister Potter." McGonagall complimented as she walked by, pacing the length of the classroom. "Two points to Gryffindor."

"Thank you, Professor." Harry nodded, smiling.

"Do it again." McGonagall Conjured another pillow with a swish of her wand. "This time, do it wandless."

"Yes, Professor." Harry nodded again. McGonagall offered him a little nod in return before continuing on her path.

Gryffindor received two more points when Hermione Vanished her pillow first try, and Slytherin earned two when Theo demonstrated the ability as well. Same as Harry, they were given a second pillow to try it without their wand.

Harry, though he tried and failed not to feel smug, managed to wordlessly and wandlessly Vanish his pillow *twice*. Hermione managed it once, but after that she struggled to muster up enough power to do it again. Theo had to murmur the incantation each time, but confidently Vanished his pillow wandlessly three times in a row. It was a successful day for them.

For students like Ron, Draco, Terry, Susan Bones, and some of the others, they were murmuring the incantation quieter and quieter in an attempt to muster a nonverbal spell. Most of them got pretty damn close, some only needing to mouth the words, but in the end couldn't quite grasp it yet.

"Man, the curriculum really is getting harder." Ron groaned as they packed to leave. "I kinda wish we were learning Human Transfiguration now."

"You say that now." Terry wrinkled his nose. "I bet you'll be singing

nonverbal praises once you turn your tongue green by accident.”

“I wouldn't mind a green tongue.” Susan grinned. “At the very least, it'd make for an interesting conversation starter.”

“That's true.” Terry said, pointing a finger in agreement. “Maybe not, then.”

“Harry is kicking our asses this year.” Draco said, shooting Harry a mockly irritated look. “Have you been holding back all these years?”

“Not really.” Harry shrugged. “I've just come to understand my magic a little better over the last year and a half. It also helps that today was more Charms than Transfiguration, and you know how well I do in Charms.”

“Fair.” Draco sighed. “Just you wait, we'll catch you in no time!”

“I'll look forward to it.” Harry laughed. “Catch me if you can.”

Chapter End Notes

Oohhhh the plot thickens... 👀

Truths Revealed

Chapter Summary

Harry attends his first lesson with Dumbledore. It doesn't go well.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone!! I'm sorry for not posting last week, Washington State (where I live) was hit with a bomb cyclone and I lost power for *6 days*. I was super busy trying to make things work with zero power (literally, my entire city was a complete dead zone for days) such as staying warm and cooking food. Sorry for the delay!

But power is back and today I can post ♡♡ I hope you enjoy!!

TW: panic attack
Stay safe <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter Six

Frozen

Harry couldn't remember the last time he and his friends were so silent, standing in a circle just to be in each other's presence without speaking. There were no jokes, no jibes, no sarcastic remarks to keep it light.

Draco reached out and took Harry's hand, squeezed it gently, sighing. “If anything happens–”

“There's nothing you could do.” Harry told him softly. They all knew he was right, though none of them looked happy about it. “But it'll be fine.”

“Oh yes, because sending you to see the person who wants you dead without remorse with the knowledge that he supposedly has something to tell or teach you is so extremely safe.” Theo muttered, voice barbed. “Not to mention the implication that this won't be the sole ‘lesson’ he has for you.”

“As long as he doesn't know about us, I'm sure I can handle it.” Harry sighed. “Besides, there's not much I can do about it anyway.”

“It's eight.” Hermione said, checking her watch. “If you don't wanna be late, it's time.” Harry nodded.

“Good luck in there.” Ron offered Harry a smile.

“Thanks.” Harry huffed. “I'll need it.”

Pulling away from his friends, Harry pushed open the door to Snape's Office and stepped inside. His grip on his bookbag was excessive, clutching it to soothe the unease bubbling in his chest. Snape's Office had been rearranged completely, which made Harry wince. Snape was *not* going to be happy about it, but at least he couldn't blame Harry for it.

The Potions stations, which did have brewing potions on it, were shoved to the walls and leaning slightly precariously. Snape's large desk was crammed in a corner and disturbing neat bookshelves on the adjacent walls. The shelves full of ingredients were nearly untouched, save one area that Dumbledore had added an odd glass cabinet filled with little vials of a shimmering silver essence that seemed halfway between liquid and gas.

“Harry.” Dumbledore was in the middle of it all, standing at a round table with two chairs that were completely out of place in the dim room. Atop the table was a recognizable basin, shallow and etched with twisting runes that almost seemed to glow. “I'm glad you could make it. It's good to see you again. Please, come in.”

“Thank you.” Harry set his bag on the floor and made his way over. “It's been a while.”

“It has indeed.” Dumbledore's eyes sparkled. “I am afraid that is due to my unpopular status as of now.”

“On that note, I've just got to ask.” Harry said with a little grin. “How are you getting into the castle? One of the secret passages?”

“I know this castle better than most.” Dumbledore said with a little wink. “It is quite easy for me to steal away if need be.”

“I saw the news saying you were still a fugitive.” Harry said, expression the picture of concern. “What if you’re caught?”

“Nobody need know I was ever here.” Dumbledore smiled serenely. “I’m being careful, don’t worry, Harry. And if I am seen here, it wouldn’t be damaging unless someone notified the Ministry, and even then I could claim to have simply broken in without consent from the Headmistress.”

“You’d take the heat for the school?”

“I took the heat for you, didn’t I?” Dumbledore prompted. Harry paused at that. “I have looked after this school and the students housed within for decades, and my dedication to this castle has not changed despite the loss of my dignity and position. It is still my top priority to protect this place of learning and all my students.”

Harry ground his teeth together, holding his tongue. *Protect the school? Sure. Except kids who learn better using magic that you consider evil, of course.*

“I’m glad.” Harry said finally. “It’s a relief to know you’re being careful.”

“With that out of the way, shall we address why I brought you here?”

“Please.” Harry nodded.

“Well, I'm sure you noticed this.” Dumbledore gestured to the basin, placing a hand on the edge of the pretty stone. “It's a Pensieve. You've seen one before, of course.”

“Yeah, back in fourth year.” Harry confirmed. He then froze as his eyes zoned in on Dumbledore's hand. “What the–”

“Ah, this.” Dumbledore lifted the offending hand, gazing at it with a solemnly sad expression. “I'm afraid this is a result of my own hubris.” Harry wanted to lean away in repulsion, but forced himself to step closer for a better look.

Dumbledore's hand was shriveled and black, fingers twisted as though they were rotting from the inside. His long nails were brittle and chipped, dehydrated and ugly as Dumbledore twirled his fingers a little in thought.

“What's wrong with it?” Harry asked.

“Remember the Horcrux Ring I gave you last year?” Dumbledore asked gently. Harry looked up at him, surprised.

“Of course.”

“Well, it seems Voldemort placed a curse on it with the intent to kill whoever put it on.” Dumbledore said in a sad sort of tone. “It's clever. I felt so drawn to the Ring, I couldn't resist slipping it on. At first I thought nothing of it, but slowly my fingers grew numb and cold. After I destroyed it and gave the remains to you, I believed myself cured of the curse. But alas, it was not so. It is a slow deteriorating curse, but a death sentence nonetheless.”

“You're *dying*?” Harry exclaimed, incredulous. “Because of the Ring?”

“Just so.” Dumbledore confirmed. “But I've lived a good life, and soon I will consult Severus to see if there is a way to slow the spread of it. Perhaps it will grant me enough time to show you everything you need to know.”

“So that's what prompted the lessons.” Harry realized. “Holy shit. You wanted to explain stuff to me before you died.”

“But that is not something for you to worry about, Harry, it is my burden to bear.” Dumbledore said. “I will not conceal my condition from you, but I do not wish you to feel any worry.” He smiled at Harry, meant to be gentle and placating. Little did he know Harry was a tangle of complex emotions that were tearing him in half.

A part of Harry was filled with vindictive glee; his Wraiths and Tom wouldn't have to worry anymore, wouldn't have to hide, wouldn't have to fear Dumbledore's looming plan that could very well get Harry killed even now. This was the break they'd been waiting for - how to stop Dumbledore from continuing his fight in a war that didn't exist. His death would solve that issue and free them to live and change the world for the better.

But another part of Harry was mourning and confused. This was *Dumbledore*, an extremely influential person who many people looked up to. He was powerful, successful, and extremely well educated. His death would be a massive loss to the Wizarding community and the waves that followed would be unpredictable and possibly detrimental in the long run. Dumbledore wanted Harry to sacrifice his life for the cause, yeah, but Harry didn't necessarily wish *him* dead for it. Harry just wanted to be safe.

“Moving past that business,” Dumbledore continued, “Let's get to the point of these lessons.”

“Right, yeah.” Harry tried and failed to put the future out of mind. “So, does it have to do with the Pensieve?” Perhaps Dumbledore planned to show him memories, moments he wanted Harry to see and understand.

“In truth, I first owe you an explanation in full.” Dumbledore said. “Take a seat.” Harry did. “Now, we talked a little bit about the future at the beginning of last year when you asked me for the Ring Horcrux. I believe I explained to you the significance of the Horcruxes, as well as the necessity of destroying them.”

“Yep, that's about it.” Harry nodded. It was barely an explanation at all, really, but Harry hadn't needed a real explanation speech back then because he already knew everything he needed to know to begin his plans. “Though… I'd like a better one now. I want to understand.”

“And that's precisely why I've brought you here today.” Dumbledore smiled. “Before we get into the main reason I prompted the beginning of these lessons, I believe you are ready to know the whole truth. About the Prophecy, your position as a Horcrux, and how we plan to move forward.”

“The Prophecy?” Harry tilted his head. “What Prophecy? You've never mentioned anything like that to me before.”

“Ah, that is the keystone piece to everything else.” Dumbledore said, pity lacing his tone. “Let me tell you a story, then.” So Harry sat, he listened, and he seethed.

Dumbledore told Harry of meeting Sybill Trewlany, of being curious of her supposed talents as a Seer, of ‘someone’ listening in and reporting what little he heard to Voldemort. Dumbledore even brought up a memory in the Pensieve depicting the Prophecy being spoken, Trewlany's ominous figure materializing in front of Harry to confirm what Harry already knew. Harry didn't know how Dumbledore expected him to react, but he did his best to be quiet and act surprised.

Now, Harry already knew everything he was being told. He also knew it was Snape that leaked the Prophecy to Voldemort, despite Dumbledore's mysterious attempt to conceal that fact. Tom was very open about the past when Harry asked, mostly because he never wanted to risk Harry feeling blindsided or betrayed through being uninformed. Tom was considerate like that.

Eventually Dumbledore moved on to address Harry's placement with

the Dursleys. Now *that* got Harry's blood boiling. More than the Prophecy, more than the possibility of his pending death, more than Dumbledore's stupid pity and fake understanding. The betrayal ran deep as emotion bubbled up at the surface.

"*You* left me with the Dursleys?" Harry asked, hands trembling in his lap. "You left me there?"

"I did. Because my top priority was to keep you alive, above all else." Dumbledore's eyes were falsely apologetic, but he expressed no regret. *None.* "You may be wondering why I did what I did, but it was a necessity that may very well have saved your life a hundred times over. Now, any witch or wizard would've happily taken you in, anyone would've been honored and delighted to raise The-Boy-Who-Lived. But you were in more danger than perhaps anyone but myself realized."

"Voldemort had been vanquished mere hours before, but his supporters were still out there, angry and out for blood. Your blood, to be precise." Dumbledore told him calmly. "I had to make my decision, and my top priority was your survival. Did I believe that Voldemort was gone forever? No. I didn't know when he would return, how strong he could grow once more, or where he might go, but I knew the moment he thought himself strong enough he would hunt you down and kill you. I couldn't let that happen. I knew that even my most complex and powerful protective spells and charms were unlikely to be invincible if Voldemort ever returned to his former power, so I devised a plan using a magic that even he cannot pass through. It was a foolproof plan."

"Your mother, Lily, sacrificed her life for you. In those last moments she threw her magic over you and created a shield so powerful it remained after her death. That shield remained intact even after Voldemort tried to kill and vanquished himself in the process, the magic of it tied to your blood through Lily's unyielding will to *protect.*" Dumbledore folded his hands, the healthy hand overtop the decaying one; it would've been the picture of politeness if not for the repulsive view of blackened skin and rotting nail. "When I came across this knowledge, I knew the only way to protect you was to weave that protection into a greater shield that would protect you for Voldemort for years longer. That shield and protection runs through your very veins, down into your blood, and I trusted that when I placed you with Petunia. I threw a shield over that house on Privet Drive, tied to that projection in your blood and your connection to your Aunt. There, housed with your own flesh and blood, the last remnants of

your mother, you would be safe."

"Thus, so long as you make a home in that house where your mother's blood lives on, you would be safe - Voldemort could not touch you. He shed her blood, but it lives on in you and her sister. Her blood became your refuge. Your Aunt Petunia knows this because I explained everything in the letter I left with you on her doorstep, she knew that your survival entirely depended on your residence in her home. That is why you were placed there, that is why you are alive."

Harry was trembling head to toe. He didn't know whether he wanted to curse Dumbledore into oblivion, watching him suffer the way he abandoned Harry to suffer for *years*, or break down and cry for hours as he mourned his childhood and the life he was forced to live. Dumbledore had his reasons, sure, maybe even *good* reasons, but for all the suffering he endured Harry wasn't so sure it was worth it in the end.

"Did you ever think to check up on me?" Harry couldn't help but ask. His chest hurt and his breathing was ragged. "Did it ever even *occur* to you that maybe they wouldn't treat me well?"

"I had considered the possibility, especially so after McGonagall advised against leaving you with them. She told me they had an aversion to the abnormal." Dumbledore told him, placating. "But my priority, as I've said, was to keep you alive. When you arrived at Hogwarts, you were not as cared for or as well nourished as I'd have liked, and it was clear to me you'd lived a hard childhood, but I believe it made you stronger. You weren't a spoiled prince or an arrogant prodigy, you were just a boy. That, amongst all the other things I saw in you, was what made it worth it."

"So you knew." Harry couldn't breathe, his head spun. "You knew they starved me. You knew they locked me up, treated me worse than a Malfoy house-elf, pushed me around and beat me into the ground, and yet you *made me go back*?"

"It was essential you stayed within the protections at least once a year, which made the summer holiday the perfect time for it." Dumbledore looked at Harry with disgusting pity that had Harry feeling nauseated. "Did I know? Not everything, no, but enough. I knew you were not being treated with love, but that is something a person can live without. I am sorry you suffered, but–"

"Do you regret it?" Harry choked. Dumbledore paused. "Do you regret

leaving me there?”

“... No.” Dumbledore said finally. “Though I mourn your lack of a childhood, I cannot regret saving your life.”

Harry shoved himself to his feet, nearly knocking over his wooden chair. “Excuse me, sir, but I'm done for tonight.”

“Harry–”

“I'll do whatever you want later.” Harry turned, shoulders tense, and scooped his bag off the floor with haste. “But right now I need to go.”

“I'm sorry you feel that way.” Dumbledore's soft voice followed Harry. “I hope you can forgive me, and I will see you next Saturday. Same time.” Harry didn't deign him a response as he slammed the door behind him.

Harry was running before he even knew what he was doing. Heart pounding, ears ringing, feet stinging, Harry sprinted through the castle to put as much distance between him and Dumbledore as possible. Heavy breaths seared his lungs, pumping arms burned, running muscles gave out.

Crashing to his knees, Harry barely felt the pain of tripping onto the floor, hands meeting cold stone with a shock of sharp cracks. Harry could barely feel his body anymore as he gasped, salt dripping into his mouth as his vision blurred.

Harry didn't know what to do.

°—~—~°~—~—°

Theo flipped the page in his book peacefully. He often read in random places, so it wasn't weird to not be in the Common Room. Today he'd chosen an alcove just off the fourth floor, tucked behind a statue that depicted a wizard with a floating sphere overhead. It was comfy and he wouldn't be interrupted. Theo loved his friends, but sometimes they were very distracting.

His friends also didn't really understand what he was reading because they didn't find it as interesting as he did. He was rereading one of his

curious Muggle books on Trigonometry for better understanding, examining the strange combinations of numbers and letters to recall the processes of solving for the applicable letter - the variable.

Mathematics was an interesting subject, but Theo did find it slightly irritating to do over and over again for seemingly no reason. The textbook gave Theo homework, dozens of questions to be answered and scribbled into the margins. Though Theo had asked Hermione why they required so much repetition in seemingly all mathematics texts, he hadn't been given a real answer. Even Hermione didn't know why.

Oddly enough, Hermione did tell him that most of the time Muggle children learned all this in school, specifically ‘secondary school’ as it was called, then promptly forgot it and never used any of it again. That seemed very strange to Theo. What was the point of learning it if they planned to disregard the knowledge entirely and never use it again? Muggles were very strange.

A sudden shock of sizzling pressure left Theo gasping. His skin stung as the invigorating sensation of sparking magic washed over him. He smelled the burning scent of a roaring ocean, embracing the harshness of breathing in water as though he were drowning. It didn't dissipate as it usually did.

Harry.

Theo dropped his book and stumbled to his feet. Never had he felt such raw energy pouring from Harry, so strong Theo felt it from so far away. But that intensity made it so very easy for Theo to follow, sprinting in the direction of that devastating force.

Something must've happened with Dumbledore, something big, something that made Harry lose complete control over his magic because whatever Theo was feeling - Harry wasn't in control.

“Harry!” Theo's heart dropped when he finally arrived.

Harry was sprawled across the stone on his hands and knees, curled up with tears streaming down his face. His breathing was ragged and uneven, enough so that Theo knew he'd been running and crying at the same time - not a great combination for optimal breathing. But Theo was stunned breathless in his own right by what else he found.

The corridor was covered in ice - frost hung in the air and bit at Theo's lungs - slick stone on the floor had Theo treading very carefully -

crystallize patterns climbed the walls to smother the overhead torches that Theo hadn't ever seen unlit - snow collected at the ceiling, unfalling as it swirled above them. Harry had turned the hall into a magical disaster of pure unadulterated energy. And it was as heartbreaking as it was breathtaking.

Harry himself was glowing in a way only Theo could see - his magical aura was inflamed, wrapping him in that ocean breeze. His eyes glowed and his hands sparked, Theo's eyes picking up the signs of Harry's magic that nobody else could see or sense.

“Harry.” Theo sank to the ground and gathered Harry up, taking his hands and touching his face to examine him. “Harry. It's okay, I'm here. It's okay.” Harry seemed relatively unharmed, which was the sole positive of the situation.

The only word Theo could use to describe the expression on Harry's face would be *devastation.* It was all he could do to wrap Harry in his arms and soothe him as best he could. Theo had murder on his mind at the thought of what Dumbledore had done to cause such a reaction.

“It's okay.” Theo whispered. “You're okay.” As Harry grabbed fistfuls of Theo's robes, trembling head to toe, they both knew he was lying.

Chapter End Notes

> Y'all please let me know about any spelling mistakes, I'm posting this at work and haven't complelty proofread it yet 💀
>
> Also, not me now taking 11hr shifts in an attempt to make up for the money I lost being unable to work during the outage 🤦

Fallout

Chapter Summary

Harry relays the information he's learned. Nobody likes it.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone!! I'm so sorry I missed a few updates, life has been absolutely insane with the holidays and relatives flying in and everything. Forgive me ♡♡

I hope you enjoy!!

TW: talk of canon abuse
Stay safe ＜3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 7

Nobody Likes It

Harry didn't know how he told Theo about what happened, or how specific he truly was, but as soon as he was calm enough to speak everything spilled out.

From Dumbledore's inevitable death and acceptance of it, to the Professor Trewlany and her Prophecy, to Snape leaking the Prophecy and unknowingly pushing it to fruition, to the shock and betrayal of Dumbledore's decision to place Harry with the Dursleys.

His friends knew that the Dursleys didn't treat Harry very well - Harry hadn't ever tried to hide it. But the harsh truth of it wasn't something Harry liked to share. He didn't necessarily have PTSD, per se, but he sure as hell wasn't over it yet which made opening up to them slightly difficult. But as Harry's world crumbled he spilled it all out for Theo, laying all that information at his feet without warning. Harry didn't know if that was a good idea considering the way Theo was, but at that moment he didn't care and barely knew what he was saying anyway.

Harry only paused when Theo squeezed his hand and Harry felt his fingers tingle painfully.

“What–?” Harry blinked, vision blurring, to find ice spreading from where he sat, frozen handprints imprinted in stone where he'd fallen. “How did–”

“Accidental magic triggered by emotion is common in children with little to no mindfulness for their actions.” Theo's voice was calm, though when Harry looked up his silver eyes were filled with what could only be described as unbelievable hatred. “In adults, typically it's caused by uncontrolled outbursts of untapped magical energy that has nowhere to go but *out*. Many witches and wizards soothe that outburst of energy with duelling, practicing, or simply blowing off steam by shooting hundreds of spells into the safest space they can reach.”

“I–” Harry was at a loss for words as he realised the result of his anguish. “This hasn't happened since I was a little kid…”

“Was it always ice?” Curiosity peaked through from under the vengeful hatred burning in Theo's eyes.

“Usually, yes.” Harry sighed. “It was one of the first things that tipped Petunia off about me. She'd open my cupboard after days of confinement, and it'd be so cold she feared I'd frozen myself solid. But somehow, every time I remained completely unharmed.” Theo's expression twisted.

“Oftentimes accidental magic such as this doesn't affect the user.” Theo said. “Especially children. It can get dangerous for adults caught unawares, however. Sometimes it can even take their life.”

“Jesus. Okay.” Harry ran a hand through his hair. It was trembling. “Well, I'm fine. So we'll deal with that later.” Theo didn't seem to agree, but he also didn't argue. “We have to contact my friend about this.”

“Something tells me he already knows.” Theo eyed Harry's forehead. “On an unrelated note, your scar is inflamed.”

“Oh.” Harry touched the rough patch above his eyebrow and winced. It sparked under his fingertip. “Yeah, okay.”

“We should probably go see Professor McGonagall, then.” Theo said firmly. “If our friend had any thoughts or concerns regarding your

health, he'd go through her."

"I agree." Harry sighed. "Here, help me up."

Despite the frigid temperature of Harry's hands, Theo didn't flinch as he pulled Harry to standing. Neither of them spoke as they walked the halls, heading for McGonagall's office.

Approaching the door, Harry could hear faint shouting from within.

"I don't care if Dumbledore finds out about me, I'm going to find Harry!" That was Tom.

"Their lessons will be finished in roughly fifteen minutes–"

"Do you have *any* idea what it's like to feel the suffering of someone you love and *cannot fix it*?" Tom's seething anger interrupted Snape's placating words. "He is in pain! I would risk discovery in a heartbeat, announce my presence to the whole fucking world if it would keep Harry from harm!"

"Perhaps the pressure you're feeling is mental, not physical." McGonagall spoke up, not quite gentle but not quite angry. "I doubt Dumbledore would do anything to bodily harm Harry. Not during the school year."

"Then you are naive." Tom snapped, "Dumbledore is a manipulator and a hubris wizard - if he believed he could get away with it, he would do *anything* to further his misguided goals."

"We can't just interrupt their lessons." Snape snapped back harshly. "It could be a delicate kind of situation that if interrupted could inadvertently harm Potter even more!"

"You don't even know what the infernal lessons are for!"

Harry and Theo reached the door, pushing it open. The shouts stopped immediately. Harry was greeted by the presence of McGonagall by the fireplace, Snape by the door, and Tom standing in the middle of the room wearing a stormy expression.

"Harry." Tom's face melted with relief as he scanned Harry and found no visible injuries. "Are you alright?" With two strides he met Harry by the door and embraced him tightly. Harry relaxed into his hold and took a deep breath, blowing it out as Tom stepped back.

Theo, behind them, shut the door gently.

“I just had a little accident.” Harry said, clearing his throat. Tom reached forward and caressed Harry's scar, sending a warm spark that helped soothe the cold in Harry's bones.

“I felt your pain, you were hurting deeply.” Tom murmured. “What happened?”

“It was all emotional.” Harry assured him. “And yeah… I was hurting.”

“Understatement.” Theo murmured from his position leaning against the wall. Harry ignored this.

“Anyway,” Harry continued, “My lesson with Dumbledore tonight was… postponed.”

“Why?” McGonagall asked.

“It's complicated.” Harry said shortly.

“Did you at least discover what the lesson pertains to?” Snape spoke up, eyes calculating.

“He wants to show me memories of some kind, using a Pensieve. He didn't get to explain much else about that though.” Harry winced. “I sorta walked out on him.”

“Why?” Tom frowned. “What aren't you saying?”

“Um.” Harry looked at Snape, chewing his lip. He then took a deep breath and squared his shoulders. It wasn't the time to be a hesitant teenager, it was time to be the leader they needed. He was their Speaker and he needed to act like it.

“Snape, Dumbledore is going to bring this information to your attention in the near future.” Harry said, firm and blunt. “You should either leave now, or you'd better be a phenomenal actor when the time comes.”

“I was a successful spy for many years, fooling both parties using me for information.” Snape said tightly. “I'm sure I can manage a small, correct reaction.” Harry sighed, but nodded. He took a deep breath.

“Please don't interrupt me.” Harry prefaced. They all nodded, looking eager or impatient. “As of last summer, Dumbledore is dying. He told

me himself that he likely won't outlive the school year." All three adults looked on the edge of displaying varying levels of alarm or surprise or something along those lines, but with a warning look from Harry they let him continue. "Before he destroyed the Ring Horcrux last year, he put it on. Dumbledore described it as though he was attracted by something, compelled to wear it. But as soon as he did, apparently it cursed him with a deteriorating sickness that's spreading from the spot the Ring rested. His right hand is completely mangled - seriously, I wanted to throw up a little bit just looking at it - but regardless he's dying, and plans to ask Snape to look into a way of slowing it so he lasts the school year. He wants a chance to teach me something he deemed really important before he dies, but aside from that he's fully accepted his inevitably approaching demise. " Harry then gestured vaguely to the adults, prompting and allowing.

"There was a curse on the Ring?" McGonagall was the first to speak, astonished as she turned to Tom. "Albus never mentioned anything to me. Riddle? Did you know?"

"I placed no such curse on the Ring, nor any of my Horcruxes." Tom tilted his head, a look of inquisitive unease. "It's possible that, over time, they each created their own forms of protection. For example, Harry informed me the Diary had a will of its own, wanting to become real and corporal and remove all Muggle blood from the school through possession. Perhaps the Ring wove a curse into its essence and compelled people to put it on, activating the curse without their knowledge."

"That is… incredible magic." Snape said, eyes wide and his voice terse. "You believe such small portions of your soul could do that?"

"It's possible." Tom hummed. "Remember, Horcruxes are powered by malice and blood. They were filled and fueled by my hatred. I wouldn't be surprised at all if there was enough passion and rage for each one to protect themselves well."

"Dying…" McGonagall looked much like Harry felt, torn between relieved and devastated by the thought. But she had ten times more reason to be devastated by it. "I can't believe it."

"This does solve one issue, that being his intention to sacrifice Harry and persuade him to fight in a war that does not exist." Tom pointed out, though he frowned. "But it creates a dozen more problems at the same time. Mostly centered around politics, how the Wizarding World will react to the passing of someone extremely influential, and the loss

of a wizard they worship. Or, worshipped. Past tense, these days."

"I really don't have the capacity to deal with all of this right now, so I'd like to be excused." Harry said, running a hand through his hair. "But one last thing: Dumbledore is almost undoubtedly going to be watching me closely this year to ensure I'm not getting up to no good while he's giving me these 'lessons' or whatever." Harry broke off with a shaking breath, fighting the burning in his lungs that threatened to smother him. "Because of that I'm not going to be able to communicate as freely. So no meetings with the others, no meetings with Tom, no owling or outside communication aimed at or sourced from me. It's too risky."

"Then how do you intend to communicate what Dumbledore is teaching you?" Tom frowned. "I for one am greatly concerned by what he deems 'necessary information' to convey via a *Pensieve* before he dies. I'd be much more comfortable if you could somehow let me know you're alright."

"Fine." Harry sighed. "I guess I'll tell McGonagall everything that happens and have her communicate it with you however she wants."

"Why not me?" Snape didn't look particularly vexed by Harry's choice, but he did seem curious and skeptical. "Am I not your preferred method of communication?"

"Dumbledore will be watching you too, obviously." Harry scowled, barely resisting the urge to snap at him. "If he plans to ask for your help with the curse, he'll be keeping an eye on you to ensure you're not running off to tell people."

"I'd *never* reveal sensitive inf–"

"Well *I* know that, but Dumbledore has serious trust issues." Harry finally snapped. "So if you'd just lay low and mind your own fucking *business* and pretend you never heard anything from me, that would be bloody splendid."

Theo, who'd remained (mostly) silent throughout the discussion, finally stepped forward. "Harry." He took Harry's hand smoothly, squeezing gently. "Take a breath."

Harry blew out a frustrated breath, then blinked in surprise as the condensation from his breath hung in the air as a frosty mist. He grimaced. "Sorry everyone." The room had dropped several degrees, cold enough to bite at hands and noses.

“Does this happen often?” Tom asked softly, eyeing Harry assessingly. “I haven't seen it before.”

“More when I was young.” Harry admitted. He sniffed irritably as the cold had his nose beginning to run. “I'm just exhausted right now, that's all.” *A lie*.

“It happened earlier too.” Theo said softly, gently swiping his thumb across the back of Harry's hand. “I found him collapsed in the corridor. He'd frozen the floor and walls, streams of ice practically seeping out of him.”

“That's what I could feel.” Tom murmured. “You were in pain, suffering so badly you had an uncontrolled magical reaction, and it traveled to me via our connection.”

“I'm fine, it's not a problem.” Harry denied. “Sorry for worrying you.”

“Harry, you should tell them.” Theo said then, silver eyes knowing.

“Tell us what?” McGonagall prompted. She rubbed her hands together slightly, then stuffed them in the pockets of her robes. “Is something aside from Albus’ death upsetting you? Is that what's caused this… reaction?”

Harry sent Theo a harsh glare, which Theo faced with passive acceptance. Harry was stubborn, but he also knew Theo would tell them if Harry didn't. And that would be much more blunt and unsweetened.

“Dumbledore just brought up some stuff from when I was a kid, that's all.” Harry ground out. “About my relatives.”

“Those godawful Muggles?” McGonagall frowned. “What about them?” Harry shook his head and squeezed Theo's hand tightly. Maybe the harsh truth was what they needed to hear…

“Harry's Aunt and Uncle abused and neglected Harry his entire childhood. He grew up with nothing, and broken for any small mistake.” Theo said flatly, eyes flashing as he faced the adults straight on. “It was revealed today that Dumbledore *knew*. He was perfectly aware Harry was beaten, starved, treated less than human, and Dumbledore *made him stay there anyway*. It wasn't that Dumbledore didn't know Harry was being treated poorly, it was that he *didn't care*. Whenever Harry tried to talk to Dumbledore over the years, confess the truth of his suffering, Dumbledore rebuked him and shipped him

right back to his relatives. Dumbledore just dropped that on Harry's shoulders with no warning, citing it was for the *'Greater Good'*. It's despicable."

"You were abused?" Tom's carefully constructed mask of cold indifference slid into place to conceal the untapped rage in his voice and expression. "By the Muggles you Obliviated? You never mentioned they were abusive, you said the Obliviation was accidental."

"It was accidental." Harry admitted, swallowing thickly. "But yes, they… they hurt me. I was so terrified of what they'd do to me in retribution if they knew I'd been sneaking out at night to do *freakish* stuff - I panicked. That's how it happened."

"*Abused* - I can't believe Albus would–" McGonagall looked physically sick, turning away to press a hand over her mouth.

"You used to stuff food in your school bag." Snape said suddenly, pale and so very still. "I caught you snacking during lessons and assigned you detention, *multiple times.* I told you not to eat…" Harry winced. Snape looked pained.

Tom stepped forward and pulled Harry into a hug, gentle and warm in the frigid cold filling McGonagall's Office. "You're safe now. I swear it." Harry, reaching his breaking point, pressed his face into Tom's chest and cried.

Harry didn't know how long he stayed there after that. He knew McGonagall also hugged him and Theo held his hand and Tom promised not to hunt down Harry's relatives and murder them; Snape simply stalked out of the room at some point, but Harry didn't bother acknowledging his exit at all.

Eventually Tom took his leave as well, kissing Harry's forehead and promising to keep in touch - subtly, of course, but enough to reassure them both that all was well. McGonagall said something about finding an excuse to have little meetings of their own, just Harry and McGonagall, to discuss anything that happened so she could pass it along to Tom. Harry barely processed everything, but he knew Theo was listening and Theo would tell him later.

Then it was just Harry and Theo in the corridor again as they left. With care and a soft hand, Theo led Harry back to the Gryffindor

Common Room for the night. Soon enough Harry was engulfed by warmth.

Nobody knew what'd happened - they wouldn't know until later when Harry called an emergency Wraith meeting - but nevertheless Ron and Hermione and Ginny and Neville and everyone else crowded around the fire to warm Harry and keep him company. Theo stayed by his side, Harry's grip on Theo's hand ironclad, and they all laid there together.

They'd deal with everything in a few hours, Harry knew, and he wouldn't have to do it alone.

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Harry stood before all his Wraiths, seventh years to second years, more somber than he'd been in a long time. They noticed. They listened.

“I called you here because I've discovered Dumbledore will be watching me very closely this year. Dangerously close.” Harry began, leaning forward to prop his forearms across the back on the chair he wasn't able to sit in. Harry was too anxious to sit in one spot - he felt constricted and trapped. So he stood, and he ignored the trembling of his hands. “That's why this meeting is at three in the morning. So that Dumbledore doesn't notice students unaccounted for. But this can't become a regular thing, eventually someone will get caught or seen or something similar, and our secrecy will be compromised. Our cause is too important to risk just because of me - I won't allow our work to be jeopardized by my own recklessness or arrogance. As such, this will be my last meeting with you all for the rest of the school year.” Chaos broke out.

Exclamations and whispers filled the room, some loudly arguing with their neighbors, asking what would they do now, how would they continue with him? Harry held up a hand for silence. They quieted.

“We will proceed with our plans just as before. I need all of you to continue our work like nothing’s changed.” Harry said, scanning the room with open sincerity. “I will protect every single one of you if or when the time comes, but until then I have to distance myself from our cause. I will still assist when I can, I will subtly convey messages

when I receive new information, but I won't be attending any future meetings until I figure out how to manage Dumbledore and the focus he's got on me right now."

"Ever since the beginning I have been up here speaking for you as a collective, an acting representative of your votes and words. Now I'm turning it over to you guys. We agreed I would be your Voice, but now it's time each of you learn to speak as well. Create your own voices, build your own plans, coordinate with each other and stay connected. You are all incredibly powerful if only you believe anything is possible." Harry smiled out at them. They were all giving him their undivided attention. Slytherins watched with stiffness and anger in their posture; Hufflepuffs sported hard expressions or teary eyes; Ravenclaws clenched their fists and held sharpness in their eyes; Gryffindors held vengeance in their expressions and set jaws. "We have much yet to change, so much still to accomplish. This revolution has only just begun. No matter our obstacles, let's see this through, yeah? Together, as always."

At the end of the meeting a small collection of his friends stayed behind. Harry welcomed the company and selfishly let them linger a while longer. Even if they should've all been headed back to their Commons.

"You are all out of sorts." Luna took Harry's hand, tracing the lines of his palm gently. Her baby soft fingertips caught on his rough calluses. "You've great struggle in you right now."

"I know." Harry squeezed his fingers. "But I'm handling it." Luna leaned against his side with an affectionate hum. Her waist length silvery hair tickled Harry's skin.

"There's something else, isn't there." It wasn't a question; Neville was too perceptive. "Something you didn't tell the others."

"There is." Harry confirmed quietly. "This can't be spread around - I'm talking top secret information that can't be told to *anybody*."

"We understand." Ginny nodded. "What is it?"

"Well… it's about Dumbledore." Harry went on to explain the situation, relaying the facts of Dumbledore's cursed hand, pending death, and what he put Harry through for dropping him on the doorstep of Number Four Privet Drive. Righteously they were furious,

Ginny even threatening to storm into the Muggle suburb to kick their asses the Muggle way with her fists. Harry talked her out of it.

“Can we focus on the Dumbledore problem?” Harry insisted. “I'd much prefer we freak about that the Headmaster has literal *months* to live.”

“Alright, fine.” Neville sighed deeply. “What're your plans for that?”

“It sounds like there's not much you can really do, in the grand scheme of things.” Blaise spoke up, frowning. “If Dumbledore is right, there's nothing to be done about it.”

“Snape's not actually going to find a way to help him, right?” Ginny wrinkled her nose. “Prolong his life?”

“He will, and I approve of it.” Harry said. “Snape can't risk tipping his hand and revealing his loyalty has changed. Besides, Dumbledore's death is going to be a complete disaster for our world. I mean, people right now think he's a delusional liar that framed me by lying about Voldemort, but even so people still look up to him. In their minds, he's the greatest wizard since Grindelwald.”

“Ironic, really.” Draco muttered.

“The point is,” Harry continued, “We need to delay his death for as long as possible. Yes, we need him out of the picture, but I didn't plan on him actually dying.”

“I fantasized about it.” Ginny said sweetly. Harry rolled his eyes.

“For now, all we can do is wait.” Harry sighed, pushing a hand through his hair. It was greasy with sweat. “Jesus I need a shower.”

“And sleep.” Luna told him. “Come on, let's go.” Harry smiled, nodded, and followed her.

Luna led their little group to the Ravenclaw Common Room, answering a pretty riddle for entry. There is where they all crashed, welcomed by the Ravenclaws because every returning student was a Wraith - all of them. Harry was warm inside as he felt so blessed for their loyalty and support.

When it was time for bed, they all piled in front of the grand fireplace with blankets and pillows for a massive sleepover. Harry ended up holding Ginny's hand while placing his head in Luna's lap. It was extremely comfortable.

“You're okay now.” Luna murmured to Harry. She kissed the top of his head with a little smile. “We've got you.”

“Thanks, for everything.” Harry smiled softly, genuinely.

Maybe it would be okay, after all.

Chapter End Notes

> Soooo I've created an Instagram account to put myself out there a little bit, and I'd really appreciate a follow!! On that Instagram I'll be posting updates regarding my fics, such as new chapter updates and screenshots of my favorite comments! If you can, go check it out at *@a_tired_and_dead_writer* ♡♡
>
> Thank you so much for your support, I appreciate you all so much!! ♡♡♡

Slow Progress

Chapter Summary

Harry and his friends dicuss to recuperate, and Tom moves forward with his plans.

Chapter Notes

GUYS I SWEAR I MEANT TO POST THIS YESTERDAY. Unfortunately, I have broken my arm Got an avulsion fracture, which sucks, but I'm pushing through!

This chapter took forever to write, but I hope you enjoy ♡♡♡

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 8

Hard Discussions

The next day was a Sunday, which thankfully meant they had no classes. Not to say they didn't have homework, because they did. A *lot* of it. Luckily, when they took turns complaining it made the whole thing a lot easier. And more fun.

“Why has *Aguamenti* got to be on the nonverbal list?” Neville muttered. “It's hard enough even with the incantation.”

“Pretty much everything is on the nonverbal list.” Michael said, frowning at the numerous scrolls and parchments strewn across their makeshift study table. They'd shoved all the smaller tables in the Gryffindor Commons together to make a larger, if not misshapen, table to use. “It's expected that we just suddenly know how to do it, despite not really doing it in previous years.”

“Maybe I should just start now.” Ginny groaned, flopping across the table. “I'm stressing over N.E.W.Ts because of you guys, and I've not even taken my O.W.L.s yet! This is ridiculous.”

“You don't have to study with us.” Hermione reminded her, smiling. “I know your head hurts terribly looking at all this extremely advanced

gibberish magic." Hermione dramatically gestured to her Arithmancy work, equations and symbols scrawled sideways across the parchment, and Ginny scowled.

"Yuck, get it away." Ginny made a mocking face and stood, settling down on the floor near Luna. "I'll be over here, safe from that utter *madness*."

"Suit yourself." Hermione rolled her eyes with a grin.

"I'll protect you." Luna said, stroking Ginny's hair. Ginny laughed.

"How about you, Harry?" Neville asked. "I heard you were doing really well in Transfiguration."

"At first, yeah." Harry nodded. "McGonagall had us doing nonverbal spells we already knew, which was easy. I excel at that kinda stuff apparently. But now that we're getting into new spells, it's getting really hard."

"Even I have to ask clarifying questions." Hermione admitted sheepishly. "McGonagall just moves so fast these days. It's hard to keep up sometimes."

"Maybe it's a blessing I'm not in that class." Neville sighed.

"I'll still show you some stuff so you don't fall behind, if you'd like." Harry offered, "Practice some of the spells we're going over in class."

"I'd like that." Neville smiled. "You're a great teacher, you know."

"Oh, thanks." Harry said, grinning. "That's what everyone tells me when I mention I wanna be a Professor."

"That's because it really does suit you." Hermione said. "You're patient, confident, and you can clearly command a room with your presence. Like Professor McGonagall!"

"Don't get ahead of yourself, I'm not sure I deserve praise like *that*." Harry laughed fondly. "I've a lot to learn still. But I'm glad you think I could do it."

"She's right about the confidence bit." Luna smiled. "We are all helplessly enamored by you, mind. You command attention effortlessly."

"I wouldn't say effortlessly." Harry replied, "But I'm pretty good at

keeping my composure."

"Speaking of your composure…" Malcolm spoke up hesitatingly. "I have a question." Harry blinked.

"What's up?"

"What happened last night that shook you so badly?" Malcolm sounded uncertain, surprising Harry. "You said Dumbledore brought up your childhood, but why did that cause such a reaction? You've never lost your cool like that before."

"Malcolm!" Hermione hissed. Malcolm ignored her.

"I only meant," Malcolm said carefully, looking back at Harry. "I've never seen you so… unsure of yourself. Almost timid, somehow. I never associated that with you before. You always seem so confident, so untouchable. None of us think of you any different for this, honest, but it does confuse me. What changed?" Harry thought about it for a moment.

"I suppose… I never really got over what happened to me as a kid." Harry admitted. "When it comes to the future, I'm a lot more focused. We've so much planned, getting caught up in Dumbledore's schemes and manipulations is pointless. He wants me dead, so he needs to be stopped. Having a plan and all of your support made it even easier. And leading is easier still, I have so many people on my side and willing to listen, it helps loads with my anxieties and stuff. But when it comes to my childhood… I don't talk about it a lot, and I guess I felt like I was a scared little kid again being told all my suffering could've been prevented, if only someone had reached out with kindness. I lost my composure."

"Well, we don't think of you any differently for it." Malcolm reached over to squeeze his hand with a little smile. "Unexpected and unfortunate as it was, I'm sorta glad I got to see it. Here I was thinking you were unshakeable there, Harry."

"I wish." Harry laughed. "No such luck."

"Let's hope Dumbledore doesn't bring it up again." Malcolm said, releasing his hand. "I hated seeing you like that."

"Hm, I think it would hurt less if he did." Harry hummed, "Now that I've talked about it with you guys, felt it all already, it feels… lighter. I don't think it'll be a problem."

“I'm glad.” Malcolm smiled.

“Why can't we just get rid of Dumbledore?” Ginny suggested then. “That'd fix the whole thing.”

“What?” Harry frowned.

“We did it last year.” Ginny shrugged. “Except now it's even easier, he's wanted by the Ministry; he's a literal fugitive. It wouldn't even be that hard to tip off some Aurors and put him on the run again.”

“That would only be more dangerous for Harry.” Neville told her, shaking his head. “We all know Dumbledore wouldn't be caught, not for real, and it would create huge suspicion in Dumbledore's eyes considering nobody is supposed to know he's been here but Harry. On top of that, he'd find a way to continue his lessons with Harry - he'd probably move to somewhere outside the castle, away from any possibility of discovery. Harry is much safer here where people can protect him. And not just us Wraiths, but the teachers too. Every one of them would step up if they believed Harry was in danger, even the ones that aren't with us.”

“I just hate that Harry has to be alone with him.” Ginny huffed, crossing her arms with a harsh scowl. “This whole situation sucks.”

“Why's Dumbledore so dangerous now anyway?” They all looked over at Dean, sitting by the fire. Surprisingly, he didn't have Seamus draped all over him for once.

“What d'you mean?” Hermione frowned. “He's extremely powerful and wants Harry dead. That seems like a damn good reason to worry.”

“Sure, but he doesn't want Harry dead *now*.” Dean said slowly. “It sounds like he's desperate, risking everything to teach Harry as much as possible before he dies. Yeah, Dumbledore's definitely a wildcard, but I don't think Harry's in any real danger from him. Or… *physical* danger, at least.”

“You make a good point with that,” Malcolm acknowledged, “But you're forgetting that we still don't know exactly what Dumbledore wants from Harry. For all we know he could be using these ‘lessons’ as a cover for something.”

“Personally, *I'm* a lot less worried now.” Luna hummed, running her fingers through Ginny's hair smoothly. “I'm with Dean for the most part. Dumbledore, at this time, most likely doesn't mean Harry any

real harm."

"He's scrambling for time, all while accepting his inevitable fate." Dean added. "He can't very well dispose of Harry when Dumbledore himself is on the way out."

"We should still be careful." Neville said seriously. "We may have the numbers advantage, but Dumbledore has fought and won against two Dark Lords and their applicable armies. Not to mention he's dying now, and desperation can be as much a killer as anything. Caution never hurts when faced with unknown circumstances."

"I'd still like him thrown in Azkaban." Ginny muttered. "Plop him in a cell right next to Umbitch."

"Guys." Harry sighed. "Remember what happened to Lisa?" They collectively sombered immediately. Harry looked at them all in turn, serious and sincere. "I'm not the only one at risk if Dumbledore becomes suspicious or feels otherwise threatened by anyone; Lisa just happened to be in the room when things went south, and she suffered because of it. We chose as a group to avoid conflict and focus on diplomacy. I'm not going to let my friends down by starting something that we'll *all* have to finish." Harry said. "Taking it slow and steady is all we can do now. Unknown intentions or not, impending doom or not." The room fell quiet.

Hermione stared at the table, hands clenched in her lap; Neville watched Harry with sad eyes; Ginny still scowled at Malcolm, who looked deep in thought; the only movement came from Luna's deft fingers braiding Ginny's long hair.

"I guess that answers my question." Malcolm broke the silence. For some reason, Neville laughed. Then they all laughed, and they were all okay again.

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"Let me get this straight," Tiberius Nott stood before Tom, confusion blatant on his face. "You plan to waltz into public, completely nonchalant, with the sole intention of being recognized by reporters and journalists?"

“Yes.” Tom said, amused. “It's the easiest and softest way to reintroduce myself to society, plus you all spread the rumors months ago, and it creates an opportunity for reporters to contact me requesting interviews. Which I plan to attend and humor, of course.”

“That's… incredibly bold.” Tiberius said, chuckling slightly. “That’s definitely one way to go about it. Are you sure? We could set up a much more controlled incident if need be, we have enough support in the Ministry to make it happen.”

“There’s nothing to worry about.” Tom reached out and squeezed Tiberius’ shoulder, reassuring and firm. “I have fallback plans if things go wrong. But, there’s no need for them. I’ve got everything under control.”

“Did you tell the Speaker you were planning this?” Tiberius asked. “I know you went and visited them last night.” Tom blinked.

“How did you know?”

“You activated the Floo without bothering to mask it.” Tiberius said, raising an eyebrow. “It must’ve been important, too. You’re usually more careful, covering the sound and light emitted so you can leave or arrive silently.” Tom sighed, fond and resigned.

“Can’t get anything past you.” Tom chuckled. “Never could.” Tiberius smirked.

“Regardless, did it involve your plans for societal reentry?”

“No, I didn’t think to mention it.” Tom admitted, “It was… It was a bad time.”

“Was there trouble?” Tiberius asked, frowning deeply. “Did it involve the Wraiths?”

“There was trouble, yes, but it revolved around the Speaker, for the most part.” Tom sighed. “The Speaker has gotten themself into a rather complicated situation, which is becoming detrimental to everyone around them.”

“I see.” There were clouds in Tiberius’ silver eyes, an emotion Tom couldn't quite place resting there. “Well then, I expect the Speaker is in for quite the surprise.”

“Indeed.” Tom cracked a smile.

“When are you planning to go?” Tiberius asked. Tom checked his watch.

“Perhaps, fifteen minutes from now.” Tiberius looked taken aback. “What? I made a plan, and I intend to enact it.”

“I'm just surprised because it seems so fast.” Tiberius said. Then he nodded. “Very well, let me fetch my cloak. I'll go with.”

“Oh?” Tom quirked an eyebrow.

“If you've just returned to Britain, it only makes sense you'd contact an old friend to get yourself up to speed.” Tiberius grinned. “Who would be better? Our lovely friends in Azkaban?” Tom sighed. It was true. Most of the people close to Tom back in the day were, unfortunately, the ones who went as insane as he did.

“Very well.” Tom smiled. “Wear sturdy boots, I plan to be out for a long while.”

“You got it.” Tiberius offered a sarcastic salute as he made for the stairs. Tom looked after him fondly.

Tiberius was slowly becoming more comfortable around him, losing the wary edge that portrayed suspicion and hope; especially since he was temporarily staying in Riddle Manor while Tom worked on reentering society. They were close back at Hogwarts, despite Tiberius being younger than him, and despite how different things were now, it was near effortless to fall into old habits with Tiberius. Sarcasm, teasing, and close friendship. Tom had no idea he missed having genuine friends all these years, only retaining terrified followers after his descent into madness. It was… nice.

A part of Tom wished his other Knights could follow Tiberius’ lead and slowly come around and become more comfortable with him, but that wasn't a luxury many could afford. Tiberius was his only Knight that had no obligation to work, no children or spouse waiting at home, thus he was free to spend the school year wherever he liked. Unless his son visited during the holidays, of course.

Come to think of it, the silver eyed boy at Harry's side the night before did bear a resemblance… Like father like son, it would seem. It seemed the Notts had a tendency to glue themselves to the central power around them. An incredibly smart choice. Tom just hoped Harry's little Nott was as supportive towards Harry as Tiberius was to Tom.

“I'm ready.” Tiberius reappeared, boots on and cloak over his arm.
“Shall we?” Tom smiled.

“Let's.”

Chapter End Notes

Hi y'all! You're probably wondering why I'm not posting as much, and it's actually good news! Apart from the arm I broke yesterday, my life has been looking up. I recently found myself a romantic partner, I've been in process of buying a house, and starting a new job that I love!

With the happy news comes the unfortunate reality is I've less time to write. However! I'm trying to create time in my schedule for writing, making it a priority!

Thank you for all your comments and support, I appreciate all of you! ♡♡♡

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!